

QUEEN OF THE GREEN SUN

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THE HUNGRY EYE

By Robert Bloch



GUARDIAN DEVIL

By Robert Silverberg

MAY, 1959

FANTASTIC

VOL. 8 NO. 3

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Editorial

Here is a stimulating guest editorial by the well-known science-fantasy writer, Arthur Porges:

IT IS A MILD June evening in 1980. Inside the living room of the Jones house only a dim light burns. The wall-mounted, three dimensional, color TV, six feet square, is dark, too. Outside in the summer air, no children are playing. Few lovers stroll in the park.

The four members of the Jones family, like millions of others, have found a new diversion. It is far more of a fad than television was. Only a few individualists—iron-willed mavericks—can escape its spell.

From a cabinet in one corner four thin wires lead to metal-and-plastic helmets on the heads of Mr. and Mrs. Jones and their two children. Each person lies in a soft chair, eyes closed. Nothing is heard except a faint hum from the cabinet.

Is this the togetherness of the future—this somnolent group, each in a far-off world of his own?

Mr. Jones is hunting a tiger in India. Not seeing it on a screen, mind you; he is *there*, in the person of Major Walter Townsend Travers, the famous explorer. In his nostrils is the hot reek of the jungle, exactly as the Major experienced it. Right now the beaters are driving the great man-eater into the open. Mr. Jones lifts the heavy double bore to his shoulder, and suddenly the tiger bounds on to the trail. There is the roar of an explosion, and the recoil forces Father back.

It doesn't matter that Major Travers hunts no more. He died ten years ago, gored by an African buffalo. One of these days Jones will die with him, but unlike the hunter, will live again,

at the end of the reel. The record of the Major's most thrilling day is preserved forever on spools of silvery tape. Thousands of men like Mr. Jones have entered Travers' skin to kill the striped cat that terrorized Indian villages in 1970.

And what about Mrs. Jones, this lovely June night? She is singing *La Boheme* at the Met. She is Jeannette Michaud, the most talented and beautiful Mimi in a hundred years. Mother is no mere spectator at this triumph, which actually occurred in 1976. It is *her* throat that swells to Mimi's farewell; *her* ears gloat over that thunderous applause. In her youth Mrs. Jones had longed to sing professionally, but her voice, alas, was a thin, unmelodic whine. No matter; now she is Mille. Michaud, singing her heart out. No wonder Mother cares nothing for the June night.

Ten-year-old Brian is enjoying an equally gratifying experience as a young vaquero on the Argentine grasslands. He feels between his thighs the surge and thrust of a fiery mustang pony. Young Jones swings his bolas expertly in a glittering circle . . . a mad gallop over the endless plain. This is even better than yesterday's race by submarine to the Pole . . .

And his sister, poor gawky, pimply girl: She is off on a date with Ricky Warren, the latest teen-age sensation. She is, in fact, one Gloria Levine, who as winner of the Date-a-Star contest, wisely recorded her emotions while on the town with Warren. The rental fees are making Gloria rich fast. Miss Jones sees Ricky smile into her eyes; they dance the new waltz-bolero. There is even a good night kiss . . .

Can one person really live the experiences of another?

All the signs indicate that in the future it will be possible to enjoy, vicariously, the emotions of other humans.

Recent experiments show that certain areas of the brain have the power, when irritated by slight electric charges, to make one literally re-experience past events in complete detail.

The second indicator is the work of biologists who found that by inserting hair-thin electrodes in the brains of mice it was possible to identify certain "pleasure regions" of the cerebrum. These areas, when stimulated by minute currents, give the animal a sensation so overwhelmingly delightful that a rat will continue to shock itself thousands of times in a row, to the complete neglect of water, food, or sex.

(Continued on page 84)

Wouldn't you think a beat joint was the last place to find an ancient alien horror? But through the smoke, the gin and jazz, terror heralded the unutterable shining of . . .

THE HUNGRY EYE

By ROBERT BLOCH

THERE'S an old Chicago saying which covers it—if you stand on the corner of State and Madison Street long enough, you'll see everyone you know in the world pass by. A seeming exaggeration, but that's what they say.

I'd been in Chicago for quite a while now, but I'd never put the matter to a test, and I had no intention of trying it today. As far as that goes, I wasn't even standing on the corner; I was halfway down the block, making for the subway entrance, but that's when I saw him. Just a flash of the profile, with the broken nose unmistakably outlined against a store-window—yet even after five years it was enough for instantaneous recognition. One doesn't forget the face of an only broth-

er, though heaven knows I'd tried during the years apart.

For a moment I was tempted to go on without speaking. But there was something about the way he hurried along, head bent, which triggered a response. Before I knew it, the words were out of my mouth.

"George," I called. "George, it's me."

I could swear to the look of panic on his face, and it wasn't that he was horrified by my grammar, either. He turned, stared, recognized me, and put his hand to his mouth. And then he ran. He ran down State Street like a man possessed.

Of course that isn't the way I described his actions to myself at the time. Nobody uses phrases like "a man possess-

ed" any more. "Possessed" by *what*? There are no demons in the Twentieth Century, we all realize that. There are no demons, no devils, no evil spirits. We live in an enlightened age, in a sane, matter-of-fact world of gas chambers, human incineration plants, wholesale massacres, scientific torture-devices and hydrogen bombs. But everything has a perfectly logical explanation, and no man's cruelty or inhumanity to his fellows is based on demoniac possession. There is no place in this modern world for ogres or bogey-men. We are well aware that we deal with nothing more alarming than sadists, psychopaths, paranoiacs, schizophrenics, manic - depressives, necrophiles, zoocerasts, pyromaniacs and other deviates and border-line neurotics whose combined total is probably less than one-third of the entire population.

So my brother George, whatever his problem, was obviously not "possessed." He was just, in popular parlance, a weirdo. And if he ran off that way it was because he was merely sick, sick, sick.

"Sick, sick, sick." For a moment I thought of following him, but the press of the crowd was too great. Besides,

why *should* I bother? I hadn't seen the man for over five years, and when he'd left then I'd been glad to be rid of him. It was obvious, whatever his present problem might be, that he didn't want to see me now. I was surprised to run across him in Chicago—we'd parted in Boston. Chances were, in a city area of four million, that I wouldn't encounter him again; if he wanted to seek me out, he could do so easily enough. He'd find my name in the papers, in the little ads on the amusement page. Let him come down to the Club and watch my act.

No sense in worrying about him and his troubles, not right now. Better to think about that "sick, sick, sick" business. Maybe I ought to work up some more bits for the act.

I was doing a stand-up routine at the Club every night. The Club was on North Clark, just a sucker-trap like hundreds of other joints all over the country, and my routine was like hundreds of other acts. The Mort Sahl scene, dig? Every week you read *The Reporter* magazine and then you make with the memorized ad-libs about the squares and all like that there. You've got Nixon jokes

and Sputnik jokes and General Motors jokes and progressive jazz jokes and Zsa Zsa Gabor jokes and G.I. jokes and Eisenhower golf jokes and Togetherness jokes and sports-car jokes and addict jokes and television jokes and if the crowd is hip you even have a few Zen jokes. Just the old off-Beatnik routine, but that's what they're going for this season. And most of all, of course, you have sick jokes. The time is long gone when Will Rogers could get up and milk laughs by talking about visiting Congress. Today every comic talks about visiting his psychiatrist.

Actually, I'd never visited a headshrinker, but maybe I should have. Because I hated this routine of mine. And I hated the audience—the oh-so-sophisticated, oh-so-selfconscious, self-assured, nervous, nonconformist in-group of enlightened, superior free souls enchained in the irresponsible necessity of satisfying their own selfish desires. Said desires being to drink, dope and debauch while avoiding any consequences of their actions; in a word, the same desires which might conceivably be found in a gang of truck-drivers. The only difference being in favor of the truck-drivers;

they at least gratified them without rationalizations. They didn't expect anyone to write books proclaiming that their antisocial activities were really the spiritual expression of an inner sensitivity searching for the truth. If a truck-driver got drunk and picked up a girl and sponged off her and then deserted her on the road, that was that. But a Beatnik, or the thousands upon thousands of pseudo-Beatniks who hid behind beards these days, insisted that he was *On the Road*. And he liked to do his drinking and make his pickups and get his kicks, man, in crummy joints featuring comics such as myself—who flattered his stunted ego by making funnies about squares.

Oh, I hated it, and no mistake. But it was a living. I got two bills a week out of it, and besides now I had Lucy.

We'd been married a little over four months now, and lived in an apartment not far from the Club. Yes, it was an apartment, an old-fashioned apartment with Kroehler furniture and there were Audobon print reproductions on the walls. It wasn't a "pad" where you sat on the floor and played bongos, ducking your head whenever you stood up so that you wouldn't

be brained by the sharp edges of one of those damned mobiles.

Lucy was no Beatnik type, and that's why I loved her. She had been taking post-grad work at U. of C. when I met her, and she had a job in a law office in the Loop now; when she came home she cooked dinner in an apron instead of hopping around opening a can of beans while wearing a dirty leotard.

Right now I was anxious to get home to her. Riding the subway I gradually forgot about brother George. He was one of *them*, one of the Beatniks. Of course, he'd been born a few years too early to call himself a member of the Beat Generation. He wasn't lucky enough to be around when the self-justification labels were passed out. In *his* time, people like George were identified, quite simply, as selfish and untrustworthy. If they lied and stole and cheated and ran up bad debts and goofed off on jobs and beat it out of town when some girl's parents raised a stink, they acquired bad reputations. And if you loved them, you tried to help them. You did your best to pull them out of jams and you did your best to talk a little sense into them, and then when nothing seemed to

work, you heaved a sigh of mingled regret and relief when they finally took off for good.

I had. And I heaved another sigh now and turned my thoughts to Lucy. She'd be home now, waiting for me.

And she was. She came into my arms, there at the door, and I forgot everything; the stupid moralizing and self-righteousness and the worries beneath them. There was only this warmth and this richness and this response. Until she stepped back and handed me the newspaper.

"Here, darling," she said. "Read this."

This was a single-column story on the front page, and my eyes moved over it hastily. It was Lucy's habit to call my attention to items in the paper which might inspire a gag or two for my act, but I wasn't getting any particular sparks from this one.

A murder had been committed this morning in the basement of the old Harvey residence, out on the South Side. The late Chandler Harvey was a well-to-do collector of oriental art who had willed his acquisitions to the Chicago Art Institute. Upon being notified of the settlement of the estate, the Institute had

dispatched two guards to catalogue and pack the collection under the supervision of orientologist Wilmer Shotwell. While waiting for Shotwell's arrival, the two men had entered the basement of the Harvey home where the collection was assembled. It was here, at approximately 12:15 P.M. that Shotwell discovered the body of one of them, Raymond Brice, 41, of 2319 Sunview Avenue. He had apparently been killed by a blow on the head from a heavy stone figurine. Police were seeking the other guard, George Larson, 33, of—

My brother, George.

Lucy stared at me. "Then I was right," she murmured.

"Yes."

"Of course, that's not such an unusual name. It could be another George Larson."

I sighed. "It could be. But it isn't."

"What makes you so certain?"

"Because I saw him, less than an hour ago. He was downtown, on State Street, and when I recognized him and called out, he ran."

"Oh, Dave, what are you going to do?"

I shrugged. "What *can* I do? I don't know where he is now—certainly not at that fleabag hotel address listed in

the paper. Maybe he got out of town. I hope so."

"In spite of all he did to you?" I'd told Lucy about George, of course.

"Yes. That's gone and forgotten. Besides, I'm not sure he's guilty."

"But the paper says—"

"I know what the paper says, and what the police say. They find a body, George is gone, and they jump to conclusions. But George is my brother. I know him pretty well. He's a bum and a moocher, and I wouldn't trust him with a wallet or a woman. But I don't buy him as a murderer—he hasn't got it in him to kill. There's no violence in George."

"How do you know?" Lucy put her hands on my shoulders. "How do you know what it takes to make a killer?"

"I don't really. It's just that I can't imagine George pulling a stunt like that."

"You're really fond of him, aren't you, in spite of everything?"

I crumpled the newspaper. "Damn it, if he'd only stopped when I called him, let me help him!"

"You're upset," Lucy said. "Maybe you ought to call the Club, tell them you can't appear tonight."

I shook my head. "What good would that do? Until we get more facts, we might as well forget about it. We aren't listed in the phone-book yet so there's no chance of George seeking us out here. And I doubt if the police or anyone else knows that he's my brother. So you go ahead to your evening class, and I'll go to the Club. To coin an expression, the show must go on."

And it went on, at the Club, around ten. I was standing there holding the floor-mike when I saw George come in. He was still wearing the same suit he'd worn downtown during the afternoon, but his collar was open and his tie was gone. His hair hung over his forehead. He was drunk.

No, it wasn't the open collar and fallen hair bit that made me so certain. It was the way he slumped down at a deuce-table in the far corner and started talking to this pink panda.

That's right; he carried a pink panda, the kind you win at an amusement park. The kind *you* win, perhaps, but not I. I wouldn't be caught dead at an amusement park. And maybe that had been George's idea. He didn't want to be caught, dead or alive,

and what better way to disappear than in the midst of a crowd? But he was still nervous, and he started to drink, and when he got enough liquor under his belt he realized he needed help. So he remembered seeing my name in the Club ads and he came here, to me.

And I came to him, as soon as I'd cut the show. Came to the corner where he sat mumbling to this damned pink panda. An idiotic thing to do—or was it? He looked like just another drunk and perhaps it was a clever move, using a pink panda for protective coloration. One thing I had to give George; drunk or sober, he was always clever, I could vouch for that.

Only he didn't look clever now. He looked scared.

"Davie-boy! It's good to see you."

I sat down. "You didn't think so this afternoon, on State Street."

"I was in a hurry."

"I know. I read the papers."

"But you don't understand—"

"Damned right I don't."

"I've got to talk to you, alone. Dave, there's something I've got to tell you, I'm going to need your help. I've never been in a spot like this before."

"You're talking about the guard?"

He glanced around, then bent forward. "No, it isn't that. The guard's not important. There's something else. Something worse. Something—"

"Hold it," I said. "We can't talk here, and I won't be able to leave now. I cut the last show at twelve; after that the band takes over for the late crowd. Stick around until then and we'll go somewhere together."

"But I can't wait that long." He grabbed my arm. "Dave, I mustn't be alone. Don't you see? Unless I talk to somebody pretty soon I'll flip—"

"Talk to your friend here," I said, poking my finger at the pink panda. "Have another drink. But wait here. I'll get back as soon as possible."

His eyes went blank, as blank as the brown buttons in the panda's head. And he stared at the ridiculous doll, stared at it long after I left the table. He hadn't lied; he was ready to flip. To snap his cap, climb the walls, or whatever phrase you choose to disguise the grim reality. There are so many charming, picturesque little phrases dealing with that subject today—because there are so many

charming, picturesque cases of acute psychosis.

But then I was up in front of the mike again, talking about psychosis myself, talking about Flipville and stopping in at your friendly neighborhood analyst, three couches—no waiting. And the crowd loved it. They loved it because they could all pretend they were laughing at the other fellow; *they* were all right. Sure they were all right—the chronic luses, the double-gaited ones and the lizzies and the barroom brawlers and the girls on tea and the boys on horse. They were intellectuals, they were iconoclasts, they were artists. In order to be truly creative, in order to dig Life the most, you had to get your kicks.

Like Sarah, for example.

I saw her out of the corner of my eye, coming in from the bar. Big Sarah, in the toreador pants and the sweatshirt; both garments bulging in all the right places. That was the story of Sarah's life—she was always bulging in the right places. She wore dangling copper earrings to match the color of her hair, and I had no doubt but that she'd made them herself. Because Sarah was an artist and she enjoyed making things. Including ugly,

scenes and handsome men. Sometimes, when she was a little high, even the men could be ugly. I knew quite a bit about Sarah, because she was one of the regulars at the Club. She was one of those who laughed the loudest at all the sick jokes, but I happened to know she'd spent some time on the psychiatrist's couch herself—and quit only when she couldn't persuade him to join her there.

But Sarah was an artist and she had an artist's eye. Right now it might be a trifle blood-shot, but it seemed to have spotted that pink panda. Because as I watched, she wandered over to my brother George and started talking. By the time I'd finished the routine I was on, she'd sat down next to him. During the course of my next bit the waitress came over with drinks. Sarah was giving him the big treatment now.

Well, maybe it was all for the best. At least she'd keep George company until I could join him again. She knew how to laugh it up, and that was just what he needed now to last out the evening. But I wished both of them were a bit more sober. The waitress was already back at the table with more drinks—doubles, this time.

I wanted to trim my act, but the crowd was with me and off to one side I could see Paul, the booker. He was grinning and I grinned back. I needed Paul. He was the guy who could pull me out of this trap—get me a better spot, maybe even downtown. So this was no time to beg off. I had to keep going.

But Sarah and George kept going, too. I watched the waitress approach again. They were toasting the panda, now. Sarah held it on her lap. She said something to George and laughed.

Then the crowd was laughing, and I went into my finale. The TV commercial business, and the horror movie jazz. That's the big sophisticated boffola, you know—kidding the horror movies. Only to make it really sharp, you throw in a few references to *The Lonely Crowd* and *Lolita*.

I bowed off.

I bowed off and started for George's table—or what had been George's table. But George was gone now. He, and Sarah and the pink panda had vanished. It didn't take a correspondence-course in detective work to figure out where they must be. Sarah had a studio down the street. Just the place for a *ménage à*

trois. Maybe she was queer for pandas.

If I could have left then, I'd have made it my business to find out. But I couldn't leave; there was another show to do in just forty minutes. The last show. After that I could go. George would still be there, if Sarah had her way. And she generally did. George was in no shape to offer much resistance.

Perhaps it was for the best; at least he'd be out of public scrutiny. But I wasn't, not until the final show was over. And in order to prepare for it, I needed a drink.

I stepped over to the bar, looking around for Paul. The booker was standing down at the end, near the door, talking to a tall, gray-haired man who had just come in. I nodded at him and he nodded back. Then he turned to his companion and said something. I thought he'd break away, and was surprised to see that the gray-haired man moved in my direction instead. He paused behind me.

"Mr. Larson—"

"Yes?"

"I am Dr. Shotwell."

Shotwell. Where had I heard that name before? Then I remembered — the newspaper story. Wilmer Shotwell, the orientologist in

charge of the Harvey collection. My brother and the other guard had been waiting for him when the murder occurred. So he must know George. And he'd found me. Did he realize George had been here? Had Paul noticed me talking to him?

I'd have to gamble on that. In a case like this, attack is usually the best defense. So I turned to Shotwell and nodded.

"Yes, I read your name in the news story tonight. Have you found my brother yet?"

"I was hoping you'd give me an answer to the same question, Mr. Larson."

"My brother and I have been out of touch with one another for the past five years. It wasn't until today that I knew he was in Chicago." I paused, but not long enough for him to ask any questions. Instead, I shot one at him. "How did you know he was my brother?"

"I did some checking. It seems he gave your name as a reference when he applied for the position of temporary guard at the Institute several months ago."

If Shotwell had checked, that meant the police would check too. Maybe it was just as well that George had gone

off with Sarah. I'd avoid a lot of explanations this way.

"He never informed me about this," I said. "I'm afraid I can't help you."

"That isn't the reason I'm here," Dr. Shotwell answered. "I wanted to warn you."

"About George? He isn't dangerous. In fact, no matter what the newspapers say, I can't believe he killed that man."

"I can. And it's quite likely that he will kill again."

"But why? Just because he may have had a fight with his fellow-guard and struck him in a moment of rage—"

Dr. Shotwell shook his head. "That's what the police believe. I know they are wrong, but I made no effort to correct them. It's better that they aren't aware of the facts."

"Which are—?"

"Mr. Larson, I knew the late Chandler Harvey very well. He was an insatiable collector of *objets d'art* and *curiosa*. He bought at auctions, he bought from dealers, he purchased through agents, he spent a fortune acquiring rarities. As an orientologist I helped catalogue only a small part of his treasure-trove; for that's what it was, what it came to represent in his own

mind. Collecting can become a form of monomania, you know, particularly in the case of a wealthy man who reaches the point where he doesn't even know what he has obtained any more. This was certainly true in Harvey's situation. He literally did not know the extent of his own possessions. Pottery, sculptures, *bas-reliefs*, jewels from all over the world and out of it."

"Out of it?"

Shotwell leaned forward. "Do you know anything about meteorites?"

"A little."

"Well, I needn't lecture. Let's just say that I have reason to believe that there are many strange, as yet unclassified phenomena concerning these particles from outer space. There are australites, for example, which seem to fall recurrently in certain areas of the Earth's surface, almost as though they were sent. Or if they were seeking—"

"Seeking? You talk as if they were alive."

"Is it so impossible to believe that there are other life forms besides the animal and the vegetable in the universe? Is mineral life so alien a concept? What is the difference between life and existence?"

What laws govern its patterns? How can we recognize life when we see it? There are living creatures whose skeletons grow outside their bodies, there is the mystery of reincarnation and metamorphosis leading from larva to butterfly. What causes the regeneration of a fingernail, how do you explain the growth of a single hair on your own body, what is the common denominator of a blade of grass and a Giant Redwood?" Shotwell paused and smiled self-consciously. "But I said I wouldn't deliver a lecture, didn't I? And I won't. All I must tell you is that I think amongst Chandler Harvey's collection of rarities was an unusual meteorite—an ancient, jewel-like object which, in a certain sense, is alive. And I believe your brother must have found it today."

"Are you trying to tell me he mistook it for a jewel, was caught trying to steal it by the other guard, and killed him?"

"Perhaps."

"Then why come to me? Why not inform the police?"

"Because they wouldn't believe me. And they wouldn't take the proper precautions with the meteorite if they recovered it."

"Precautions?"

Shotwell sighed. "Have you heard about precious stones which seemed to carry a curse, to bring death and violence to their owners or whoever came in prolonged contact with them? Have you any knowledge of temple idols before whose jewelled eyes a bloody sacrifice is made? Have you ever wondered why certain infamous mass-murderers carried so-called 'lucky stones' upon their persons?"

I stared at him. "You mean to say you believe this meteorite possesses some intelligence which influences men to kill? But why?"

"Some living entities subsist on air, some on sunlight, some on flesh. Some require water—and some need blood." Shotwell grimaced. "I don't know very much, really. I have been able to trace this particular fragment back a mere fifty years. At that time it appeared in St. Petersburg, as the property of one Gregorovitch, the Little Gray Brother. History knows him as Rasputin. The meteorite had already been artificially faceted and polished then, but it may not have been when he acquired it, during his years of exile in Siberia. There have been great recurrent meteor showers in that area, you know. It is said that Ras-

putin used various jewels as hypnotic agents—"

I stood up. "Really, Dr. Shotwell, I don't see what you have to gain by all this."

"It's not a question of gain. I have only one purpose in seeing you. If your brother seeks you out, try and secure that meteorite. Don't turn it over to the authorities; notify me immediately. Here is my card."

Somebody tapped me on the shoulder. It was Lew Kirby, the leader of the combo at the Club. "Two minutes 'til showtime, Pops," he said. I nodded at him.

"Got to run along now," I told Shotwell. "You heard the man."

"Yes, but if anything happens—"

"Okay. I'll get in touch with you." And I moved away. The old brushoff. That's the only way to handle the weirdos, and Shotwell was a weirdo from way back. I only wished he'd stayed there. Him and his living meteorites and out-of-this-world life forms.

The trouble was, he hadn't stayed there, in his own little private world of fantasy. And I couldn't brush off what he'd told me. Even though he went right out, and I went right on to do the act,

the whole crazy business kept nagging at me.

What was he *really* trying to say? That strange entities may exist in outer space and occasionally succeed in reaching Earth—that they need blood for nourishment and influence men to provide it—that such an entity became a part of the Harvey collection—that my brother stumbled across it today and killed a guard and stole it.

None of this made any sense. Besides, George hadn't really shed any blood; he'd conked that other guard on the head with a statue and run off. More likely this thing was a jewel, he'd seen it and gotten a case of sticky fingers, the guard saw him put the snatch on it and interfered, and George panicked and let him have it with the stone figurine. In which case perhaps Shotwell was spinning this wild yarn deliberately. He knew I'd never repeat such nonsense to anyone else, but at the same time he was giving me the message. George had a jewel, and Shotwell probably wanted it for himself. I was supposed to play stooge; get the thing away from George and give it to Shotwell. No wonder he hadn't hollered copper—if the jewel was valuable, but no

one else knew it had been in the collection, he could latch onto it for keeps.

That made a lot more sense to me. That's the kind of thing which *could* happen in my little world—the world of the Club, where everybody is out for just two things; loot and kicks. And there are no mysteries, only the psychoses and neuroses which arise when people are thwarted in their search for loot and kicks.

Well, right now they were spending their loot at the little tables so that I'd stand up there and provide them with a few vicarious kicks. So I did. I gave them my monologue, gave them the hip line of you-and-I-know-all-the-answers patter, with every gag reassuring them by inference that they were smart and sure and superior in a world of stupid conformists.

Oh, it was all so simple! The squares looked down on the Beatniks and the Beatniks looked down on the squares, and I looked down on them all because I was really kidding them both, I had the real message. By keeping one foot in either world I was free of both. And there were no *other* worlds.

That was the only trouble. There were no *other* worlds,

no worlds where this business of George and the meteorite fitted in. He *had* killed somebody, but why? George wasn't a murderer. He was my brother and he was in a jam, stolen jewel or no. Right now he was drunk, and shackled up with the whackiest nympho I'd ever seen. And pretty soon the cops would do what Shotwell had done; they'd find me, and start asking questions. If George happened to wander back while they were around, or when I had some law tailing me, it would be curtains.

And it *was* curtains, finally, for the act. I bowed off and begged off, and headed out of the Club. I knew where I was going now, where I had to go. Sarah's studio was just down the street. I'd find George, give him the word. Ask him to set me straight on this whole mess. If he was still looped, I'd see that he sobered up, got in shape to travel. But above all, I must get him out of there, get him away from that man-eating female whose artistic efforts extended to canvas and mattress alike. And if she gave me any trouble—

But she didn't give me any trouble.

The downstairs hallway was open, as it always was,

day or night. And the light, as usual, was burned out in the stairwell. On the fourth landing I could see the dim illumination seeping from under the studio door. That door was never locked, either.

I suppose I could have knocked. It would have been the gentlemanly thing to do, under the circumstances. Right now, though, the circumstances were such as to make me forget I was a gentleman.

The circumstances were that it was past midnight, and the hallway was dark, and I was afraid when I came creeping up those stairs. I was afraid because here in the dark it was so hard to remember about fantasies and hallucinations and affects and all the learned labels by which we seek to explain and expunge our secret dreads. And it was so easy to accept the atavistic memory and menace of myth—of alien life burrowing upwards from inner Earth or swooping down from outer stars, of life that feeds upon us, fastens upon us to eat and drink with myriad, monstrous mouths—

So I didn't knock. I walked right into the studio. And Sarah didn't give me any trouble. She just stood there

in front of the big easel and continued painting.

She had been painting for some little time now, apparently, and I doubt if she even realized I was in the room. I doubt if she realized anyone was in the room. Perhaps she might *never* realize the presence of another person again. No, it wasn't that she was drunk and it wasn't that she was in a state of shock. Her movements were the rigid and jerky ones of incipient catatonia (how easily the phrase comes, and how little it really *explains!*) and her eyes were fixed in glassy concentration upon the canvas.

She was painting the pink panda, of course, but she hadn't bothered to use it as a direct model. Her panda was huge, a hastily blocked-in figure covering the entire area of her canvas, and its outlines were grotesquely distorted. It wasn't cubism or surrealism or anything abstract. She'd merely added and altered, so that the panda was now a misshapen monster with a single, blazing eye; a grotesque mutant spawned of a teddy-bear and a Cyclops. And it was no longer a *pink* panda. It was red, and it was ropy, and thick globs of pigment had already congealed in dark masses.

Occasionally she bent forward to the sofa beside her to dip her brushes, and I glanced at her palette.

Her palette was the body of my brother George, who lay sprawled out on the couch, his limp arms still hugging the pink panda to his breast. From breast to crotch he'd been ripped completely open by her palette-knife, and she was dipping her brush in his wound, dipping her brush in blood and entrails as she painted her monster from life. From *his* life—

I could have screamed. I could have screamed, and struck her, and run for help. Except that now I knew there was no help. George was dead, and she was possessed. Not psychotic, but possessed. Driven, compelled to do what she must do; shocked beyond sanity by killing him, the subconscious rationalization merged with catharsis and she returned to her art. She was atoning for the crime by painting a symbolic portrait of the criminal.

So I made no outcry, because I realized now that what Shotwell had hinted must be true. *There are more things in Heaven and Earth—*

There are more things coming to Earth, out of Heaven

or some inconceivable alien hell. George had stumbled across one of them, and killed. He brought it to her, and she killed in turn. And it would go on, and on, unless I acted in time.

I acted. I walked over to the corpse and took the pink panda in my arms. She didn't hear me, didn't see me. She was painting the creature's mouth now. The hungry mouth that gaped beneath the stare of the hungry eye.

I picked up the panda and then I turned and ran out of the studio. The stairs thumped beneath me, and the panda thumped against my chest. It thumped and thumped, I could hear it, feel it throbbing there all the way home. There wasn't far to go. It was quite late, now, and the streets were deserted. Anything can happen in deserted streets at night, you know, even in a great city. A vampire can poke his head out of a manhole. A bloated corpse can rise from the fog-wreathed water of the river. A shower of blazing life can fall from the outer stars—

And a pink panda, a silly pink panda from an amusement park, can sound its hideous heartbeat like a devil's drum.

I could only hope that Lucy

wouldn't hear it when I let myself into the apartment. I could only hope that she would be asleep by now, long home from her evening class and too weary to wait up for me. She usually went to bed without waiting. I prayed she had tonight. Then I could call Shotwell and wait for him to arrive. Maybe I could even give him what he wanted without Lucy knowing. It would be best if she didn't know, if she'd never know.

Luck was with me.

Lucy had retired, leaving the light on in the kitchen. She'd eaten a snack before going to bed, and the leftovers of her midnight lunch were still on the table. I pushed the plate and cup and silverware aside and put the pink panda down.

Now that I wasn't holding it close any longer, I wasn't conscious of the thumping. It was just a toy once more; a foolish, harmless toy. And that, of course, was all it had ever been. There was no malignity about it, no cyclopean essence. George had won it at the amusement park and carried it along with him as a drunken whim. One ear was a bit battered, and the side of the head was torn—

Torn? It had been *cut*.

George had cut it, and not because of intoxicated impulse. He'd cut it and carried it along with him, and no wonder it thumped, because the meteorite was inside. That's where he'd hidden it away. And he'd carried it to the studio and Sarah was aware of it, and then—

Then, *what*?

Had it happened the way Shotwell said it happened? Had the mere presence of the stone been enough to influence a susceptible, already unbalanced psyche?

I didn't know. I didn't care. The one thing now was to get out Shotwell's card, call him, let him come over and take the damned thing away. The damned thing that had already been linked with two deaths today alone, and God knows how many more through the years. *If* Shotwell wasn't as crazy as the rest. As crazy as Sarah was, as crazy as George had been.

But George *wasn't* crazy. And I wasn't, either. There are no monsters. A meteorite is just a piece of metal. It can be stuffed into the soft skull of a fuzzy pink panda, and it can be drawn out very easily.

You can feel it in your hand, because it throbs. It isn't cold and it isn't warm—it just *pulses*. It pulses there

in your open palm and you stare down at it.

And it stares back.

It stares back, because it's an eye.

What had Shotwell said—that sometime, somewhere, somebody had faceted and polished it until it resembled a jewel? He had been wrong. It hadn't been artificially cut at all, and it didn't resemble a jewel. It resembled an eye. It *was* an eye.

You *could* find such an eye in the forehead of an ancient idol. And you could easily imagine it set in the head of a Cyclops. But staring at it now, I didn't have to imagine anything. I didn't have to imagine, because I *saw*.

I gazed into the eye and I saw everything . . .

The Arctic plain was barren of snow with the coming of spring. Stalagmitic cairns dotted the bleak surface; great rock-masses that seemed imbedded in the earth, but which might have fallen from the stars. There was no life here; no life as *we* know it, under that brooding sky.

And then life came. The bearded elders of the tribe advanced across the plain in slow processional, bearing the grease-dipped torches. Before them capered the *angedkok*,

the shaman. He carried the girl in his arms.

She did not struggle, for she had been drugged and lay limp, nude and insensible. The shaman placed her upon the flat outcropping ledge of a cairn, and the drums thundered all around him. This was the chosen one, the maiden sacrifice of spring. She would lie here, her body bared to the savagery of the sullen sky, until night came. And with the coming of night, the dark brothers would venture forth to feast. The wolves of darkness would come to devour that which was their due, and then seek their lairs for a season. Thus spring would come safely to the wilderness, for the eaters of life would be appeased by this sacrifice.

So spoke the drums. And so spoke the shaman. And then the tribesmen shambled away, and their torches died in the distance. The body on the altar lay lifeless as the black maw of the horizon slowly swallowed the sun.

And then the thunder came again, but not from the drums. The sky shook, and a renewed radiance illumined the firmament. The maiden stirred restlessly, awoke. She sat up, stared about her. Her eyes widened for there, in the

shadows beyond the cairn, she saw the skulkers, the waiting ones. The wolves had come. They snarled at the sky and edged closer. The thunder boomed.

Suddenly they turned; turned and ran, howling. And the ruddy radiance cast blood upon their backs, for a red rain descended.

The maiden rose from the ledge and slipped down, shivering. The earth was shaking all around her, and the cairns tilted crazily, bobbing and weaving in the eery light. The light was coming from the sky—*falling* from the sky!

She turned to flee, but the light pursued. And suddenly it coalesced, condensed into a single, concentrated blaze that soared and swept and swooped between the cairns like a single great eye. An eye that pursued her. An eye that wove a web of light about her nakedness, an eye that settled at her feet so that she halted and stooped down and picked it up, only to drop it with a shriek of mingled pain and horror as the heat seared the flesh of her palms.

But still she stared at it, squatted and stared. And as the thunder waned and the light faded and the night came, she continued to stare.

She stared until the eye cooled and she did pick it up and hold it to her breast; an eye that was alive and staring between the two blind eyes of her nipples. And she walked across the barren plain, walked in darkness until she came to the place where her people stayed and slept about their dying fires.

She stared down at the eye and then she picked up the stone knife and she walked among her people and she slew. The knife rose and fell, rose and fell, and they awoke and screamed. But when they saw her eyes, when they saw the third eye she carried, they did not resist, did not attempt escape. She slew until her knife was red to the hilt, until the arm which wielded it was bathed in blood. And then the shaman bowed down before her and the elders worshipped also, for they knew she was the bride of a god. Thereafter it was she who gave in sacrifice and she who wore the eye in an amulet woven to hang between her breasts . . .

In time she died, but the eye lived on. And it moved on. I saw the Tatars come and raid, and the eye moved southward with them on their return march, in the saddlebag of a

chieftain. He spent hours staring at it before a battle or a raid, and then he slew and slew . . .

And a Mongol took it from the Tatar, and it found its way to India, and for a time it was indeed the eye of a goddess—Kali, the Dark Mother, whose *phansigars* slew with the silken cord . . .

And a Moslem wrested it from the temple, and a Seljuk adventurer took it from the Moslem, and a soldier of Napoleon found it in the plunder from the field of Aboukir. He returned to Marseilles, and for years thereafter Marseilles was haunted by a mass-murderer who roamed abroad at midnight, slitting throats with a bayonet . . .

The police of the last Louis found it during the Commune, and it passed from hand to hand. A Prussian held it for a time (there were a series of brutal slayings in Prague) and a seaman carried it to London where it fell into the possession of an eccentric gentleman who was suddenly impelled to carry on a bloody private crusade against ladies of the evening . . .

And to Russia it returned again, to Holy Mother Russia and Holy Father Rasputin. Staring into its depths, the monk induced visions, in him-

self and in others who became his victims . . .

The Bolsheviki looter who found it went berserk. The curio-dealer in St. Petersburg sold it to a Greek merchant and then hung himself. The Greek merchant lost it when he went on trial for murder. Chandler Harvey's agent bought it when the government fell and a corrupt official sold a roomful of art treasures, sight unseen, to the highest bidder. It was never unpacked until this morning, when my brother George found it, misplaced in a carton containing mountings of Coptic coins. And the guard saw him pocket it, and he picked up a figurine standing on the table beside him and he crushed the skull of the guard . . .

And he put it inside the panda at the amusement park and carried it with him. There was a great confusion in the mind of my brother George. He couldn't understand why he had killed. He hadn't *meant* to kill. Sure, he saw this hunk of jewelry and he figured it was valuable, who knows? You could get a few bucks for a thing like this, and nobody'd ever miss it. So he put it in his pocket and when this character, this Ray,

Brice, spotted him, he got panicky and started swinging. Only that damned thing was lying on the floor, it had dropped out of his pocket, and it kept staring up at him and he stared back and the next thing you know he was lifting the figurine and smashing it down on Ray Brice's head . . .

I *knew* what my brother had thought. I knew, because the eye knew. It knew what all of them had thought; the naked virgin, the tallow-faced Tatar, the bearded Mongol, the dark priests of Kali, the Mameluke who died at Aboukir, the fiend who gloated in the night of Whitechapel, the monk who strangled his little white doves in orgies at St. Petersburg.

And I knew what drunken Sarah had thought, what she had sensed when she brought George to her studio. What her unbalanced, undisciplined, uncanny artistic intuition had focussed upon without even the necessity of *seeing*—its presence in the panda was enough to set her off. "Kiss me, George." And one arm behind his neck, so, and the other arm free, the hand free to grasp the palette-knife and bring it up, and the redness and the gushing and then the

shock, the trauma of the deed accomplished and the realization, and the *fugue* into denial of reality and catharsis combined, the blind painting of the murder-beast . . .

That's what it wanted. That's why it had come from the stars, come to feed. To feed and to feast. Shotwell was right; there *are* other forms of life, other ways of life. And this entity needed nourishment. Sarah had used a knife to bring blood, but George had used a blunt instrument and others had used the cord, the noose, their bare hands. The instrument did not matter, because blood did not matter. It wasn't blood the creature wanted, it wasn't even killing. It fed on something else—on the released emotion of the killer. That's what it needed, that's why it sought life in death. *It ate emotion.*

I stared down at it and it stared up at me, and we both knew.

We knew what was right and what was wrong, and the answer lies in *being*. Being and becoming. To be is the only purpose, and to become more the only goal. One becomes more by destroying lesser being and incorporating itself in one's own essence. One must devour the sensa-

tion of others, add it to one's awareness and capacity. It is a feast without end, life without end.

To seek emotion in sexuality is a snare and a delusion, for one wastes one's own substance in the attempt; just as one eats himself in attempting to heighten sensation through drugs or drink. So the Beatniks are fools, and their "kicks" merely the convulsive spasms of rigor mortis in a stiffening corpse. And the squares are fools too, because they shun sensation and fear its effects.

And I was doubly a fool and doubly damned because I tried to live so as to make the best of both possible worlds. Not knowing, until now, that there are more than two possible worlds. There are inconceivable worlds beyond worlds beyond the stars, worlds of sensation beyond sensation which I could seek and share.

I'd sensed those worlds when I'd seen what the eye had beheld. Now I knew why some men killed—not because they were fanatics, not because they were sadists, not because they were deranged. They killed because of the hunger which could be sensed and sated, the hunger that never ceased. And while

they fed that hunger, they shook the stars. Psychosis, neurosis—meaningless labels, more insane than that which they attempt so inadequately to describe. All words were meaningless. *Dig? Crazy? Kicks? Man? Cool?*

The eye could dig its way into your brain.

The eye was crazy.

The eye was kicks.

Man? *What is man?* You can be greater than man when you share the sensation of a greater being, a greater awareness from a greater world.

Cool. The eye was cool in my hand. It throbbed because it was alive, Alive and staring at me.

Why did it stare?

To tell me these things.

To tell me to help it.

To tell me to help myself.

To *share* with me everything that it was, and could become.

The eye stared up at me. Stared hungrily. That was it. The eye was hungry. It would always be hungry, and I would always be hungry, but if I took it away with me now there would be years of feasting.

And that was the thing to do. The eye and I would go away, together. Away, from

the stupid world of squares and the equally stupid world of Beatniks.

Now I knew how they all must have felt—the famed and feared killers of the past.

And I turned to go. That was my sole intention, merely to go.

I didn't expect to find Lucy standing there. I could scarcely see her, actually, be-

cause the eyes were all around me, the ring of hungry eyes.

I couldn't really see her any more than I could really see the bread-knife on the table.

All I could see was the eye.

And all I could do was what must be done.

I reached for Lucy.

I reached for the knife.

And I fed the hungry eye—

THE END

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this one or hate
it. Read on!

ONCE there was a queen,
in the Land of the Green
Sun, who arose from the Royal
Bed in the morning, looked in-



QUEEN OF THE GREEN SUN

By JACK SHARKEY

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

to the Royal Mirror, and saw a stalk of celery growing out of the top of her head. Whether or not she screamed at the sight is still open to conjecture; as a queen, she had a certain reputation for *savoir-faire* to maintain, and a terrified bellow would have been far beneath her Royal Dignity. Besides, in the Land of the Green Sun, the appearance of celery atop one's head was

not a sight to evoke terror, but rather, a contented delight, for the bearer of the Sacred Celery was considered the chosen of the gods. The persons fortunate enough to find the stalk sprouting upon them—it happened once every thousand apexes—were the beloved of the land. For one solid year, it was their privilege to live in the Royal Palace, as though they were royalty themselves, and to wine and dine and whoop it up with abandon, with no—well, hardly any—thought of tomorrow. At the end of the year, the person thus endowed would be taken in solemn procession to the top of Mahogany Mountain, and the stalk of Sacred Celery (along with the top of the person's head) would be removed, and ensconced in the Emerald Temple for the adulation and awe of posterity. It had been argued by some of the former celery-bearers that the loss of their craniums was going a bit too far, but it was pointed out to them (on their way to the top of Mahogany Mountain) that this was the only way in which they could be certain the Sacred Roots would not be damaged in the process. And so, in the Land of the Green Sun, each day on arising, the citizenry, male, female, young and old, would

rush to their mirrors to see if they were the lucky ones. After a careful, and fruitless examination of their respective scalps, they would sit back with a sigh of bitter regret. (Some said that the sigh was more of relief, but that is undoubtedly a vicious rumor circulated by the Camps of the Carrot-Eaters, to the south.)

The queen, however, could not be truly said to be overjoyed by this sign of honor. After all, she lived like royalty *anyhow*, and rather than having a reward offered to her, she had nothing but the prospect of sudden curtailment of her normal activities in a year, and the mental image of her cranium, mounted upon a pedestal in the Emerald Temple with her glorious red-and-black striped hair dangling in soft waves to the floor, brought tears to her Royal Eyes. And so, while it is uncertain as to whether or not she screamed, it is a fact that she did *something*, else why should her handmaidens all be rushing down the winding corridors of the palace toward the Royal Bedroom, with their wooden toeclips clacking frenziedly upon the glossy floor?

By the time they arrived,

however, the queen had had enough presence of mind to wind her head (and the Sacred Celery) with a large orange turban, hiding her secret from prying eyes. She would not admit to having screamed, and the handmaiden who had been first to voice such a suggestion had had her back-scratching privileges suspended for a week. The queen, after the weeping girl had slunk miserably from the Royal Presence, commanded the handmaidens to fly quickly to the far end of the palace, and to arouse Havler Grem from his slumbers in his decadently comfortable feather-pit.

If anyone could help her, the queen reasoned, it was Havler.

Havler Grem was the Royal Minister of Interstate Commerce, and, since there was only one state in the Land of the Green Sun, some of the people thought that he had a pretty soft job. Be that as it may, Havler arrived in due time at the queen's bedroom, bowed solemnly to his Monarch, and remained in that subservient stance until the last of the handmaidens had fluttered away to have—at the queen's suggestion—a picnic in the Royal Gardens.

No sooner had the door

closed behind the last of them, than the queen, with a brave, tragic smile, whipped aside her orange turban, and let Havler's eyes, as he straightened up from his bow, fall upon the pale green stalk atop her head. Havler, after a momentary uprising of his bushy eyebrows and the faint suggestion of a cynical smile curling the corners of his thin-lipped mouth, pointed out to the queen, with a certain sarcasm, how fortunate she was to be amongst the elite of the kingdom, a chosen one of the gods. There is no record of the queen's reply to Havler Grem, but the residents of the palace talk of the unaccountable rise in temperature that day for the space of a quarter of an hour. Havler, when the queen had finished replying, asked her what she intended to do about the celery: Would she publish the news at once, or would she wait until the height of her birthday celebration, due to begin that very night?

The queen replied, with some frigid dignity, that she intended to get rid of the (the adjective here used has been thus far unable to be translated by historians delving into this period; from its context, they can only assume it was a rather nasty one.)

celery stalk, and the sooner the better. There were, she intimated, books on the subject, were there not? There were, of course, but all such books, dealing with the removal of Sacred Celery (the possession of which was such an honor) had naturally been banned from the kingdom, and the penalty for being caught with one of them was far worse than—as the townsfolk put it—being caught with the celery.

Havler, of course, had read all the books. And the queen knew it, and he knew that she knew, so there was little use beating around the bush any longer. What the queen wanted to know was how to divest herself of her unwonted (and unwanted) vegetation, and she wanted to know at once, or she might be tempted to adulterate the feathers in Havler's pit with a bushel of thorns, and confine him therein with nothing but slime lizards for company. Havler decided the wisest course—besides, he'd had his fun for the morning—was to tell the queen how to go about it.

Together (the queen having first replaced the turban) they hurried down the corridor to Havler Grem's room, to consult one of the forbidden

books. The queen kept urging Havler to hurry; at any time, she felt, the palace residents would begin to ask questions about that turban—especially the Royal Hairdresser, who had that morning, for the first time since her employment, been told her services were not necessary, as the queen had decided to let her hair alone for a change, and there was the even worse—though remote—possibility that the celery would start going to seed (a turban can be wound only so hugely without inciting talk.)

Havler, remaining calm despite the queen's frantic urgings for greater haste, thumbed through the pages of the Emerald Bible, a book written entirely on swatches of silk (reputedly from the original worm), by a malcontented high priest of the temple who had decided—before he was captured and destroyed—that people might as well know that obedience to the priest-sorcerors of the Emerald Temple was not necessary if you knew the counterspells. Havler paged idly through—the book's slithery pages gave him a certain sybaritic delight—the Emerald Bible, and finally, when the queen was nearing the verge of nervous collapse,

opened the book wide to a certain passage inscribed in glittering golden ink. It dealt with "Celery, Sacred, Removal of".

The queen tore the book from his hands when he announced he'd located the counter-measures against encroaching celery, and read it carefully, and with fluttering heart.

The method was simplicity itself. All one had to do was to get—in writing—a request from any other person in the kingdom for a transference of celery, and, on the burning of the parchment (necromantic protocol called for parchment; paper or silk wouldn't do) the bargain became finalized, and the celery would transport itself instantaneously to the cranium of the person who had asked for it. The queen having read it twice over began to grow pale. More than the people of the kingdom suspected, she knew of their less-than-enthusiastic checkups at their morning mirrors, and the chances of finding a person stupid enough to be amenable to signing the request (or of finding a person literate enough to write their own name) were few and far between. And there was the further danger that if the person refused, they would (since

they'd been approached by the turbaned queen) know of her possession of celery, and know further of the fact that she'd consulted the forbidden books. And the still further danger that even if they accepted the celery, they would somehow let slip the awful truth that the queen had been chosen by the gods and had fudged on the deal.

With a small Royal Sigh, the queen sank down into a chair and let the book close with a silken slam. How could she possibly go about losing that celery? Havler, sensing her dilemma, suggested, almost casually, that a person could possibly be made to sign something without knowing what it was that they signed. The queen started to emerge from her blue funk. Havler further insinuated that if the person knew not that there were any connection between the signing and the appearance of the celery, they would have to assume that the celery had—since this was the period of the thousandth apex—appeared of its own volition, and that they were *naturally* the chosen one. The queen brightened even further. And, Havler pointed out, the queen had in her possession at that very moment a large volume entitled "Expendable Sub-

jects" (which included all the populace but the queen and Havler) from which she might select a name at random.

The queen, moving so fast that Havler could barely keep pace with her, flashed down the corridor and back to her room, where she threw open the aforementioned volume and espied, at the head of the list of expendables, the name Leejee Lahl. And what made her task even simpler, Leejee was employed in the palace kitchen, a few short flights away from the Royal Bedroom. The queen closed the book and smiled a smile that even turned Havler's blood cold . . .

Leejee Lahl, unaware of her date with fate, was at that very moment down in the kitchen, peeling potatoes for the Royal Dinner Party that night, in honor of the Queen's Birthday Celebration. She peeled automatically, not watching her hands at all, and the peels, nearly a half-inch thick, thudded gently to the flagstoned floor of the immense kitchen, arising into a pile that hid her rather large bare feet. Leejee's eyes were focussed on some middle distance, and to look upon her vapidly pretty face, one would

think that she had not a thought in her head. And one would have only been off by one thought.

For Leejee thought solely of Garnel Ross. Garnel the Handsome, Garnel the Bold, who that very night was to meet her back of the Royal Garden Gate, and take her away with him (riding tandem on one of the swiftest desert frogs in the land) to the Camps of the Carrot-Eaters, to the south. Garnel was a warrior, tall and strong, and his rank amongst the Carrot-Eaters was nearly that of prince. Someday, if he could live longer than the other aspirants to the Teakwood Chair, he would be King of the Carrot-Eaters, and Leejee, as his wife, would be queen. She sighed, thinking of her lover, thinking of her future queenship, thinking of ruling over all those people, eating all those carrots. It was quite a step upward, socially, for the humble, beautiful and stupid daughter of a toeclip-maker. And as she was lost in her introspective reveries, dreaming always of Garnel, his muscular arms, his soft, creamy-blue hair, and wide-set pink eyes, she heard not the approaching toeclip-clacks of the queen herself, until the fuzzy shadow of a tall orange

turban fell upon her pile of peels.

Leejee broke from her thoughts of Garnel and looked upward, into the smiling (and tense, though she didn't notice) face of the queen. She felt a bit less than subservient at the moment, since she, too, was in line for the throne, but she acted democratically polite when the queen spoke to her, and accepted the Seat of Honor at that evening's celebration without even asking herself why the queen of the land should choose the humble, beautiful and stupid daughter of a toeclip-maker as the Honor Guest of a Royal Party. And, after the queen—and the trailing, whispering, expostulating form of Havler Grem—had left the kitchen, Leejee reasoned that it was only right that she, a future queen, should have her first taste of Royal Living before she eloped with Garnel Ross. It would undoubtedly put her in good stead with the Carrot-Eaters if she had a little experience at Royal Living before she got to the Teakwood Chair.

Leejee sighed again, and returned to her labors, her mind dreaming of the night, when, after the party, she would be racing across the Crystal Desert with her lover, astride the

sleek gray-green flanks of a bounding frog. It was an event not many girls had a chance to consider. A small frown creased her brow as she realized that the party would run beyond the hour at which she was to meet Garnel at the gate, but Garnel, if he truly loved her, would understand that she was doing it for him: that he might have a queen of whom he could be proud. He could certainly wait a few more hours for her. What did it matter that every moment he spent in the Land of the Green Sun was fraught with danger? What did it matter that there was a substantial price on his head . . . his creamy - blue - curly - haired head? Was his love for her not strong enough to brave the additional risk? And what did it matter that the Royal Guard would be doubled on the rough log wall about the Royal Courtyard that night, to assure the merrymakers that no peasantry crept near enough to even hear the sounds of the fun? Garnel was brave, was he not? He would surely understand that she, even though a bit later than promised, would certainly be coming to him. Leejee sighed yet again, and kept on with her flaying of the hapless potatoes. Tonight, she thought to herself,

will be a night to remember always . . .

The smoky green sun, having reached the center of the overhead dome of pallid gray sky, the point of its apex, began to reverse its direction and spiral in increasing circles toward the jagged circle of mountains that comprised the horizon of the Land of the Green Sun. One time it would circle completely about the kingdom, seemingly rolling along the uppermost peaks of those mountains, then it would dip out of sight behind the tallest—Mahogany Mountain—and a gray-green twilight would come upon the land. Then would the party begin. The rim of the smoky green fireball was just coming in contact with that very mountaintop when, from the tanglewood behind the palace, Garnel Ross, astride his slack-jawed, sleepy-eyed desert frog came riding stealthily up to the back gate of the palace. He let his soft pink eyes rove over the vicinity of that gate, giving them leave to seek out the object of his heart's desire: Leejee Lahl, the beautiful, the humble, the daughter of the toecup-maker. His pink eyes roved in vain; no such object did they encounter. Garnel, shivering a bit (for the low-circumference period of

the green sun was chill), dismounted from his steed, gave it a large rubber bug to chew upon, and crept carefully toward the distant wall of logs . . .

As he crept ever nearer, his heart thudding against his ribs when he espied the doubled guards upon the upper part of the wall, the sound of music came to his ears. He recalled then that this was the night of the queen's birthday celebration, and that all the palace residents would be on hand to indulge in the festivities. From the far side of the wall came the roaring lilt of drunken laughter, and Garnel smiled within himself, knowing that, thus occupied, none of them would think to guard the Garden Gate. Soon, whether or not they knew it, they would be short a potato-peeler in the palace kitchen. It was a cruel trick to play upon them, but Garnel steeled himself against any thoughts of mercy toward the hated royalty of the Land of the Green Sun. Let them seek out and find and train a new potato-peeler, he said to himself. It would serve them right. From his vantage point beyond a small scrub pine, he saw that the guards, rather than keeping an eye upon goings-on outside the

wall, were concentrating their attention upon the doings in the courtyard itself. It wasn't every day they got to see such a splendid show. Garnel, more than confident that he wouldn't be observed, was prepared to skirt the courtyard proper and head for the garden gate when he heard another sound, somewhere between a whinny and a cackle, mingled with a fresh surge of Royal Laughter beyond the wall. The sound made his heart leap, his hackles rise, and his tongue go dry. He would know that voice anywhere: It was that of Leejee Lahl, his betrothed.

What might she be doing in the midst of a Royal Party? Garnel wondered this, and also wondered why she was doing anything other than waiting for him at the appointed place. Perhaps, he told himself, she was a prisoner? Mayhap the queen—plague upon her—had discovered their upcoming tryst and had taken steps to assure Leejee's remaining in humble servitude.

Garnel, throwing caution to the winds, felt a fierce anger rising within him. Rising along with it, from his crouch behind the scrub pine, he vaulted to the log wall, scrambled up its rough bark side,

slid over the brink of it on his stomach, and plunged headlong into the waving fronds of unmown grass on the far side. Had he been unobserved? He hoped so, as he lay there, his face in the dirt, his body criss-crossed by the long pencil-shadows of the grass. The guards at the wall top made no outcry, nor did the boisterous sounds of revelry abate. Garnel, deciding he was safe, began to crawl stealthily through the clinging weeds and grass on his stomach, until he drew near enough the perimeter of the cleared courtyard to see the festivities themselves. But Garnel looked beyond the courtyard proper to the simple gilt-speckled couch on which Leejee sat, her simple, cowlike eyes wide and watery, observing the festive performers that cavorted in the arena. Or so she seemed to his eye.

Actually, Leejee's mind was not even aware of the goings-on. This was due both to a natural aptitude for blankness and a great quantity of fermented tomato juice which she'd been imbibing like water since early afternoon. And there was a third reason. Leejee, so much enamored of her tall, handsome king-to-be, could think of nothing but

Garnel, whose bride she would become that very night.

The Royal Dancers bounded into the arena, and the band struck up a swiftly surging waltz as the lithe bodies of the men and women soared and spun and whirled to the fantastic rhythms of the dance. The women shrieked their delight aloud as their partners hurled them through the torch-lit night air, trailing a rainbow stream of gauzy finery behind them. Up, down, to and fro they wound, in an intricate pattern of insane color and fierce abandon, until, at the climax of the music, they all fell heavily prostrate upon the earth, some of the more dedicated ones never to rise again, being danced to death. But Leejee thought only of Garnel, his pink eyes glowing with love.

As the remnants of the dancers carried the bodies of the dead and dying away, the Royal Clowns appeared, somersaulting over one another, whacking themselves over the heads with petrified hollyhocks, tearing the very clothes off their backs, beating gongs, drums and cymbals, setting fire to their shoes, and throwing mud at the nearby guests. But Leejee, lost in her thoughts of Garnel, did not so much as smile, merely coming

out of her reverie long enough to take another sip of her fermented tomato juice.

Why is she here? Garnel asked himself over and over. He knew that the couch on which she sat was the place of highest honor. How had Leejee, the Royal Potato-Peeler, daughter of a humble toeclip-maker, gotten herself into such an enviable situation? Garnel decided to wriggle closer and find out. At that moment, he heard a sound, and froze into immobility. Someone was walking through the tall grass and weeds, and coming his way. No, not just someone, two people. Garnel could hear their voices, a man's and a woman's, speaking in hoarse, nervous whispers. One of them sounded a bit like the queen, but Garnel, peering between stalks of grass, could see no crown, though he did get a glimpse of what seemed to be an orange turban. He'd almost turned his mind back to his loved one, when he heard them mention her by name. Listening much more closely, he realized, all at once, that this *was* the queen, after all. And she was going to— *What* did she say? ! !

Garnel's stout heart turned quite cold as he heard the queen tell her confidante—

who just had to be Havler Grem, his voice was so oily and low and vile—how near her insidious plan was to its completion. He lost some of the words, but it became clear enough to him that the sooner he took Leejee away from this place, the safer she would be. He would wriggle around the courtyard, get behind the couch upon which Leejee sat, and then, drawing the fire-hardened oaken sword, he would hack the birthday guests to pieces, carry Leejee away on his shoulder, set fire to the log wall, and—No, that was no good; someone was sure to try and stop him. Maybe—Despite the dirt and grass-stains on his face, he found himself smiling as his plan entered, took hold, and grew in his brain. With scarcely a whisper of noise, Garnel humped himself quickly through the grass, carefully skirting the region where the queen and the Minister of Interstate Commerce were still talking—the queen was fishing for compliments on her birthday gown of the finest spun sand, and Havler seemed to be deliberately avoiding the bait—and wriggled determinedly toward Leejee, his love, the light of his life . . .

Leejee, in the midst of a

large swallow of juice, was startled to hear the voice of her lover quite close at hand. At first she thought it was coming from within her mind, but an irritated rustling in the grass that almost overhung the back of the gilt-speckled couch convinced her that he was truly with her. Garnel, crouched uncomfortably behind her, told her of the fate that lay in store for her should she sign the parchment the queen had already prepared. Leejee thought about it a minute and decided that he was right. What could she do? Garnel told her. And, as he spoke, her face curved into a vengeful smile of flinty-eyed anticipation. His message completed, Garnel hitched himself around, and crawled back the way he had come. Many minutes later, Leejee observed his tall, magnificent body as he stood up on the far side of the courtyard and climbed back over the wall. None of the other guests seemed to have noticed him, but that may have been either because of the cleverness of the entertainers, or the fact that they were all too decadent to really care. The queen, seeming to come from nowhere, suddenly seated herself beside Leejee on the couch, and Leejee pretended once

more to be engrossed in the evening's entertainment.

A battle to the death started. The Royal Gladiators were now in the arena, bowing their final obeisances to the queen, and then proceeding to brain one another with clubs, until only one man was left standing, and he fell over during the applause. But so intense and all-absorbing was Leejee's love for Garnel that she never even heard the pop as the gladiator fell from his victorious stance.

The yellow - and - violet striped moon was beginning to lose its grip on the center of the sky, and to slide in a long spiral toward the mountain rims surrounding the kingdom. The sun would soon start its climb around the sky toward the next apex. The guests were all looking kind of furry-eyed and droopy, and even the final act—a man who held corn kernels in his mouth until (after judicious application of a torch beneath his chin) they began to pop—was unable to hold their attention. The queen yawned, stretched, and got up from the couch. Leejee followed the queen wearily toward the palace, not even looking back as the man, his feat accomplished, was rushed by a group of friends toward a waiting

tub of butter, into which he plunged his head, valiantly forebearing shrieking.

The queen, leading the way up the Royal Staircase toward the sleeping chambers—Leejee had been given one for the night—was unaware that Leejee was "on to" her scheme, as she produced, almost casually, a square of parchment from somewhere within her gown, and Havler Grem materialized a pen, its point freshly inked, for Leejee to use in signing the document. It was, the queen told Leejee rather carelessly, merely a sort of receipt acknowledging that Leejee had had a good time at the party. Leejee, without hesitation, signed it. Instantly, the queen tore it from her grasp, and dashed down the staircase, heading for the Royal Basement where the Royal Stokers were keeping the Royal Furnaces in white-hot headiness. Havler, as Leejee looked after the queen, yawned elaborately and vanished into his sleeping chamber. A sort of swoosh of air and a gentle thump, just before his door swung closed, told Leejee that he was safely ensconced in his feather-pit for the night, or what remained of the night. All at once, Leejee grew tense. This was the moment she and Garnel had planned for.

For Garnel's plan was hideously simple. Rather than sign her own name, Garnel had explained, all she had to do was to sign another name, and *that* person would be the next sprouter of the Sacred Celery. And what better name to employ other than that of Havler Grem? Leejee giggled to herself as she tiptoed to the door of Havler's room. Hearing his rumbling snores from the depths of the feather-pit, Leejee crept silently but confidently across the room to the window, where Garnel was climbing a ladder, eager to claim his prize.

As he reached her, and would have lifted her over the sill, Leejee held back, and indicated by gestures that she wished to await Havler's shout of despair when he should first feel the growth on his cranium.

At that very moment, down in the Royal Furnace Room, the queen, with the aid of a long heat-proof pole (the fires were *very* white-hot), thrust the parchment, with its damning signature, full into the flames. It hissed, turned brown, then black, then flared into leaping needles of red fire and was gone. At that instant, the orange turban sagged, lost its contours, and fell about the

shoulders of the happy queen.

Simultaneously with the immolation of the parchment, a horrified scream rang through the feather-pit room of Havler Grem. Leejee heard it and smiled, and then her smile turned uncertain and died. The scream did not seem to emerge from the dark recesses of the feather-pit. She listened more carefully, and tried to divine the source of that eerie, piteously hopeless noise. Ah! It came from behind her. Leejee turned about. There was none behind her save Garnel, her lover. But what had happened to him!?! Leejee's cowlike eyes widened even more than their usual width as she watched with horror the greenish, stiff, leafy thing that burgeoned gently upward through the blue curls of Garnel's hair. For, so all-absorbing and all-engrossing was Leejee's love for Garnel that she had written *his* name by mistake. Leejee, with a soft cry, swooned dead away on the floor of the room, while Garnel just kept screaming for the longest time . . .

Or, at least, that is the tale told nowadays around the campfires of the Carrot-Eaters (to the south), when their Bachelor King, Garnel of the Tall Hat, is not about the place . . .

THE END

GUARDIAN DEVIL

By
ROBERT
SILVERBERG

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

He was just a good newspaperman when it all started. But that was the trouble—he was good. He remembered things. He put two and two together. And he found the hope and curse of mankind.

A MAN died in Sumatra that day, and half a world away in Brooklyn another man made an entry on a chart, frowned, shook his head, and wondered. The man who had died in Sumatra had been Prijak Permusjawarat, 63, dynamic leader of the Indonesian Destiny Party. The man in Brooklyn was Sam Curry, 33, obscure feature-writing staffman for the obscure telefax sheet *The Brooklyn Daily Star*.

The death of Prijak Permusjawarat rated front page even in the *Star*. Permusjawarat was one of those men whom nobody had heard of outside his native land a decade ago, and who figured in every discussion of global affairs today. Three years before, in 1979, Permusjawa-

rat's newly organized Destiny Party had gained its first foothold in the legislature of the Republic of Indonesia. Their platform was simple: conquest of New Guinea, Borneo, the Solomon Islands, and other Pacific outposts that belonged, Permusjawarat said, "by right" to Indonesia. Eventually he envisaged an Indonesian Empire that stretched from Bangkok to Easter Island, probably taking in Australia and New Zealand as well.

For three years the Indonesian demagogue had threatened the uneasy peace of Southeast Asia with his talk of expansion. Last year his party had captured a sizable bloc in the legislature. This year they were making their bid for power in the forthcoming voting.



With each new death an incredible pattern was taking shape.

And now, thought Sam Curry as he entered the long name on his chart, Prijak Permusjawarat was dead. Cut off in the prime of life, in the full bloom of health. The Reuters despatch used in the *Star* attributed his death to a sudden cerebral stroke.

The touch of an unseen hand. The rupture of a cerebral capillary. And a bullvoiced, strident-tongued patriot crumples in the streets of Palembang, dying and taking with him the mainspring of his movement. The Indonesian Destiny Party would wither and die, now that Permusjawarat had left the scene. Permusjawarat, confidently expecting to live another twenty or thirty years, had named no successor. The certain struggle among the heirs presumptive would finish the Destiny Party.

And good riddance, Sam thought! But how timely it was that the demagogue should be stricken in the middle of the month before the elections. Why? Why should it happen so conveniently? Why had Ostrovsky died when he had, why had Santeuil, why Leonardi, why al-Hafiz?

Sam shrugged wearily. It was too early in the morning to worry about it. He rolled the chart up, stuck it in its

cubbyhole over his desk, and went into the kitchen of his two-room apartment overlooking the East River to see about breakfast.

Breakfast, as usual, was orange juice, bacon and toast, coffee. Sam jabbed the proper buttons on his Electronic Housewife and sat down to wait. It was nine in the morning, the fifteenth of May, 1982. And there was a new entry on his chart.

By ten, he was due at the *Star* office to pick up his mail and any assignments that might have come in. Then, if he had any work, he'd get out and take care of it, getting back to the office by three or four to write his story and go home. Not a bad life, Sam thought. But not a very good one, for a man who once had higher ambitions. The *Star* gave him \$130 a week, flat, though sometimes there were extras when a syndicate or a wire outfit picked up one of his stories and passed it along. But there was something stale and unprofitable about spending one's days interviewing crackpots for the edification of the nine hundred thousand subscribers of the *Star*.

Sam gulped the cold orange juice and thought about the new entry on his chart. The

chart added the spice to Sam's life. It had been Ellen's idea in the first place, he thought. Five years ago, at that party—

Ellen Robinson, that was her name. A willowy strawberry blonde with a light dusting of freckles across her pretty nose, and a grim determination to entrap Sam Curry in matrimony—a determination that Sam had been able to frustrate, though not easily.

Ellen was a well-read girl, and because Sam was a newspaperman she had been trying to impress him with her familiarity with current events. What she didn't know was that Sam specialized in interviewing antique - shop owners and nine-year-old calculus whizzes, not in interpreting and analyzing foreign affairs. So for the first couple of weeks of their relationship she let him have it with choice tidbits culled from the most reputable news analysts.

And at the party given one sticky mid-August night to celebrate the engagement of a friend, she had forever changed the course of Sam Curry's life by saying lightly, as if it were good cocktail-sipping banter, "Did you notice, Sam, that that dreadful man Ostrovsky died this afternoon?"

Sam nodded. "I saw it on the ticker just before I left the office today." He tipped up his martini glass, wishing fervently that lovely Ellen were a little bit less of a bore.

"I figure that'll mean a complete reevaluation of Polish foreign policy now, don't you think? And most likely a lifting of that stupid trade embargo too."

Sam didn't think. All he knew about the late Mr. Ostrovsky was that he was an important Pole, *eminence grise* of Polish politics, a stubborn, insular, old-fashioned man who seemed dedicated to reviving the defunct Cold War. Seemingly indestructible, Ostrovsky had been carried off at 79 of a fatal blood-clot near the heart.

Sam mumbled a couple of sentences by way of amateur political analysis, hoping Ellen would let the dry subject drop. But she didn't.

"Isn't it remarkable," she said, pitching her voice too high as she always did when launching into something significant, "that so many reactionaries and obstructionists have died in the past few years? Last month it was that Syrian dying in the middle of the oil talks, and the month before it was what's-his-name,

that crooked Hawaiian labor leader mixed up in the rackets—”

Nodding, Sam concentrated his attention on getting a refill from the martini pitcher. But for once Ellen's words made an impression of a positive kind. He listened more carefully.

“It's almost like a sort of pattern,” she was saying. “The world is heading in a certain direction, a *good* direction, but there are some people who keep trying to hold it back. Only one by one these people are dying, about one a month, almost like clockwork. Sam, have you noticed the way it seems to run?”

Sam hadn't noticed. But Ellen had planted a seed of curiosity in his mind. The next day, he got to the office half an hour early and occupied himself by checking through the *Star* files for the last six months.

Assume, he thought, that history has a certain direction. That the world is heading along its time-line toward a state of harmony, toward a civilization in which friction is minimized, in which all the component parts mesh properly, in which heartache and bloodshed are old and fading memories. Assume, too, that there are some people who,

for good motives or bad, are acting in such a way as to push the world back the other way, back toward the mid-century nightmare civilization in which atomic blowups lurked round every piddling diplomatic hassel.

All right, Sam thought. Now check the obit pages.

He scribbled down the names on a memo pad as he came across them, going back through the months.

16 August 1977: Boris Ostrovsky, 79, Polish Foreign Minister, enemy of the West.

14 July 1977: Mohammed al-Hafiz, 60, Syrian-born Interior Minister of the United Arab Confederation, mischievous schemer dedicated to a policy of confusion and obfuscation.

15 June 1977: Mike Phillips, 55, Hawaiian labor leader, involved in half a dozen West Coast rackets, fomentor of race riots in Honolulu, considered a potential candidate for Hawaiian Senatorial contest in '78.

Sam had extended the list back to January by midmorning, and for the eight months he had a list of eight names, each the name of a man who in his own way had put a stick in the wheels of progress, *each*

dying around the middle of the month.

There was a definite pattern. A fascinating, incredible pattern taking shape. Sam drove down to Flatbush to interview a housewife who had just won \$85,000 in the national lottery, then motored hastily back to the office to do some more checking of the back files after he had written up his story.

He thumbed through yellowing telefax sheets until long past six that evening; the rewrite men, trooping through the morgue in search of scattered data, goggled in amazement at the spectacle of Sam Curry working overtime. But he sat at the bench with the bound folios spread out in front of him, jotting down occasional notes on his pad and completely ignoring any remarks that were being made.

And there was a pattern, all right.

Sam traced it back four and a half years without a break. At least once a month, without fail, someone who might be considered an enemy of progress had died. In a couple of cases Sam was forced to stretch his definition—as in the case of the mass murderer who had suffered a sudden heart attack two days be-

fore his scheduled execution—but for each month, Sam had an entry on his list. And always the same time of the month, too, between the thirteenth and the seventeenth.

During the next couple of days Sam extended his research. The chain broke in September of 1972; at least, diligent bird-dogging failed to turn up a plausible candidate during the proper period of that month. Then the list picked up again, travelling backward for three more years without interruption. June of 1969 had seen no hewing-down that could fit the pattern.

The next break came in December of 1964. After that, it continued again until February, 1960, and before that no pattern whatever could be discerned. Sam spent two weeks browsing through the files of the *New York Times* for the 1955-1960 period—the *Star* had not been founded until early in 1961—without coming up with anything useful.

But the data he had already found was stunning enough. For a period of seventeen years, from 1960 to 1977, a mysterious plague had trailed those who might be considered enemies of progress. Once a

month, with only three interruptions in nearly two decades, the invisible hand had descended and carried off a victim.

In some cases the verdict had been unjust, Sam thought. But he could see how casuistical reasoning might persuade the unseen assassin to unleash his bolt in that direction. Trends could not always be foreseen. A man who seemed like a saint might quietly be working for the downfall of world harmony; a demon's work might prove ultimately beneficial in the long run. This sometimes happened.

But generally the bolt had been true to the mark. And, year by year, month by month, the world had moved out of the shadow of imminent destruction that had menaced it for fifteen years.

During the five years from 1977 to 1982, Sam quietly made additions to his chart, each month. Prijak Permusjawat, dying on the fifteenth of May, joined the long roll of the dead.

Sam Curry did not believe in coincidence. But it was hard to explain away the data on his chart as anything but coincidence. It had to be nothing but a tremendous run of luck for humanity, a run extending for better than twenty

years with only a handful of interruptions.

It *had* to be a run of luck, Sam told himself. In the name of sanity, what else *could* it be?

That day, when Sam reached the office, a couple of men had amused smiles for him. He noticed that somebody had left the clipping from the morning edition on his desk, telling of Permusjawat's death.

A few of the others knew about Sam's particular obsession. They had asked him why he so diligently studied the back files, and why he hopped so much when a bigwig died in midmonth, and finally, one night when he had had a couple of beers too many, he had told them. They hadn't believed, of course. They had laughed, until he had reeled off the last fifteen or sixteen months of the list for them and made them sit up and gape.

They weren't overly concerned, naturally. They called it coincidence and let it go at that. But every time Sam had a new name to add to his list, there were smiles in the office.

"Killed off old Permusjawat, eh?" said Les Michaelson, the assistant Day City Editor as Sam picked up his

mail and riffled through it, tossing out the publicity puffs.

Sam shrugged. "It doesn't pay to get imperialistic ideas in this world, I guess. Sooner or later the old goblin comes down on you and takes you away."

"You still think there's a guardian angel who watches over us and knocks off guys like Permusjawarat when they start acting up?" Michaelson asked.

"I'm not making any guesses," Sam said. "All I can do is point to the evidence."

"Better not point too hard. It might be *your* turn next."

"Maybe so," Sam said. There were moments when he wondered about that himself. Was he The Man Who Knew Too Much? Would the unseen archer nail him one of these days, perhaps?

Sam slipped in behind his desk and looked through the rest of the mail. Invitations to local dinners; requests from publicity-hungry Brooklynites for interviews; comments on his last by-lined piece.

Sam started to pigeonhole the stuff. According to the note he had left for himself on his desk, he was supposed to drive out to Brownsville today to do a feature on an eleven-year-old kid who had won a science prize for building a miniature

computer that was being considered for government use. Sam hated to do the precocious-kid stint. Half the time the kids were obnoxiously conceited and spent an hour jawing about their own brilliance, while there was always the nuisance of overeager parents hovering by to toss out little nuggets of background color about Junior's early life as a two-year-old whiz. Besides, Sam felt uncomfortable in the presence of kids who knew more about the way science worked than he did. It isn't easy for a grown man conscious of his own quasi-failure in life to take a pedantic lecture on quantum jumps from a nine-year-old.

Still, a job was a job, and at noon today he was going to be in Brownsville for a chat with Maurice (Mickey) Yoseloff, age eleven. And tomorrow—

The phone rang. Sam snatched it up, heard the *Star* switchboard operator say in her robot-like voice, "Here is your party, go ahead please."

"Hello?" Sam said.

"Is this Mr. Curry?"

"That's right."

"Mr. Curry, my name is Jonathan Waters." The voice at the other end of the wire was thin, nervous-sounding. "I think your paper may pos-

sibly be interested in running something about me. I'm an inventor."

Oh, no, not another one, Sam thought grimly. But he was schooled to professional politeness. He knotted his jaw muscles and said, "An inventor, Mr. Waters?"

"Ah—yes. I've got a device here that might be useful in agriculture. It—kills unwanted weeds and insect pests, you see."

Sam forced a chuckle. "Well, now, Mr. Waters, I'm sure that's a useful thing, all right, but as far as the features department of the *Star* is concerned we prefer our stories to be more—ah—*unusual*? Unusual, yes."

"This is rather unusual," Waters went on, undaunted. "It isn't a new kind of poison I've invented, or anything like that. What I have is a machine that wipes out beetles or weeds or caterpillars at long range, easily and conveniently, by a radically new process."

Sam sighed. "I'm sure it's a fascinating gadget, but on the other hand—"

"I know you're extremely busy," Waters persisted. "But if you would only give me half an hour for a demonstration, I'm certain you'd see the value of what I've done."

Sam doodled on his desk

blotter. He remembered a conversation of a couple of days ago: Mr. Dale, the publisher, moaning bitterly to Ryan, the gardening editor, about the Japanese beetles that had overrun his Long Island estate after ten years or so of dormancy. Maybe, Sam thought wildly, this fellow Waters' gadget would actually be workable, might even be of some use on the publisher's estate. It didn't hurt to get in good with old Dale, living costs being what they were. And Waters seemed desperately anxious to be interviewed.

"Okay," Sam said. "I'm pretty busy this week, but if it's convenient for you I suppose I could make a trip to your place the day after tomorrow—"

The day after tomorrow was Wednesday, and on Wednesday morning after stopping off at the *Star* office Sam drove out to the Boro Park section of Brooklyn to see Jonathan Waters. He had mild misgivings about the whole trip. But there was nothing else more exciting on his schedule than a visit to the Prospect Park Zoo to do a story on the newly arrived giant bear, and the bear could wait a few more days.

The address Waters had given was on one of the side streets, a pleasant neighborhood with trees on the sidewalk and rows of two-story houses down the entire block. Like so much of Brooklyn, the area was a backwater that had resisted the encroachment of freeways and giant apartment developments. It was a sleepy neighborhood, quiet in the noonday May sunlight.

Sam parked in Waters' driveway, jotted down his mileage for the benefit of his travel expense account, and clambered out, lugging his camera. Unlike many of the *Star* staffmen, Sam liked to take his own pictures. Having a payroll photog around often made the subject clam up, or, worse, spend all his time mugging for shots.

Sam planted himself on the scanner mat on the doorstep, and the red light went on over the door, telling Sam that he was being looked at. A moment later the baleful electric eye winked out and the door opened.

"Won't you come in?" Jonathan Waters said.

"Thanks," Sam said, and stepped inside.

Sam had a habit of visualizing people from the sound of their voice. He couldn't have been more wrong in picturing

Waters. The inventor had a high, weak voice, uncertain of pitch. But in the flesh he was a tall, massively solid man with heavy shoulders hunched slightly forward, a strong face, a jutting beak of a nose. His eyes were startling: piercingly keen, but with a sad, almost misty look at the same time. Waters looked to be about fifty or fifty-five, but well preserved.

Sam followed Waters into a sitting-room off the main foyer. He was still jolted by Waters' appearance. He had expected a diminutive man, spindleshanked and hollow-chested and nearsighted. Sam was built on a small scale himself, a lean five-nine, and he felt uncomfortably dwarfed by Waters' bulk.

"Would you care for a drink?" Waters asked in that improbably feeble voice.

Sam grinned apologetically. "When I was a wee lad I promised my dying grandmother I'd never touch a drop before three in the afternoon. It's too early in the day for me to begin, I'm afraid."

Waters smiled cheerlessly. "Of course. Do you mind if I—"

Sam indicated that he didn't, and Waters went to a sideboard to get the drink. He

poured Scotch into a highball glass, vanished into the kitchen for a moment, returned with the glass filled with water. Sam noticed that Waters' hands had been shaking as he poured the drink. It was only a few minutes past noon, but Sam had the feeling that this was not Waters' first drink of the day. He hoped he hadn't been dragged out here to be told of some indefinite alcoholic fantasy.

Waters said, "I've never been interviewed before, so I don't know how to go about it. But I suppose we ought to begin by seeing my machine."

"That sounds like a good idea," Sam agreed.

Waters led him through the back of the house to the rear yard. The place didn't look like an inventor's home, Sam thought. Unless he kept all the tools and gadgetry in the basement.

Waters pushed open a screen door and they stepped out into an enclosed back yard with a few trees and plenty of weeds growing in it. A ping-pong table was pushed up against the side of the building. Waters indicated a black box on the table, about the size of Sam's Speed Graphic.

"That's it," Waters said quietly.

"What does it do?"

"It removes pests," Waters said. "Let me show you what happens."

He flipped two hasps and lifted off the upper half of the box, revealing nothing very spectacular within: there was a diamond-shaped antenna made of copper wire, a tuning dial, a square plate of burnished copper. Sam unlimbered his camera and, after getting the nod from Waters, snapped a picture of the inventor and his machine.

Waters pointed to a little thicket of weeds not far from the table. "See that one over there? Recognize it?"

"Ragweed?" Sam guessed.

"Right. A hayfever-causer. It's the pollen that does the dirty work."

Waters stooped over the clump of ragweed and broke a portion off one of the plants: about six inches of stem and leaves. He positioned the torn-off segment on the copper plate of his machine, adjusted the antenna, began to move the tuning dial.

"Watch," he said.

Sam watched. For nearly a minute nothing happened, and the only sound was the heavily stertorous breathing of the big man turning the dial.

Then, suddenly, all the ragweed plants in the back yard

drooped and withered and died.

Sam's jaw sagged. "But—how—"

"Let's try it again," Waters said, smiling. "With the goldenrod, this time. Why don't you take before-and-after pictures?"

Obediently Sam took a shot of the goldenrod plants. Waters broke off a flower and a couple of leaves, positioned it on the plate, tuned, waited.

The goldenrod withered as if blasted by the desert sun.

"It doesn't make sense," Sam muttered. "How do you do it? That little box—"

"One more demonstration," Waters said. He beckoned to Sam and pointed down at the ground at one point in the back yard. Sam saw a few glossy blue-black shapes.

"Japanese beetles," Waters remarked. "An old trouble-maker making a comeback now." He scooped one of the beetles up between thumb and forefinger and placed it on the copper plate, fencing the energetic insect in with a little barrier of cardboard.

"Stand over there and watch the beetles," Waters said. "Don't worry—it's perfectly safe."

Sam watched. He watched for three long minutes, and

abruptly the busy beetles stopped moving, wiggled their legs feebly for a moment, and died. Sam looked up at Waters. The big man's face was beaded with perspiration, but he was smiling.

"Well?" he asked.

"Dead," Sam said. "Every one."

Waters nodded. "Of course. Come on inside, if you will. I'll give you the whole explanation, or as much of it as can be explained. I'd like to have another drink first, though."

"I think I could use one myself," Sam said.

"But your dying grandmother—"

Sam smiled. "She said there would be times when a drink before the afternoon was permissible. I think this is one of them."

"Call it an amplifier," Waters said a little while later. Sam, not daring to rely on his memory, was taking notes in his own self-invented shorthand. "It picks up a signal and boosts it enormously. Say, a gain of a hundred thousand or a million, perhaps. Who knows?"

Sam blinked dizzily. "And this signal that gets amplified—?"

"A destructive signal, of course. The machine picks up

the signal, boosts it, focusses it on whatever's in the field. A piece of ragweed, a bit of goldenrod, a Japanese beetle. Or a photograph of any of those things. And the signal destroys."

"At what range?"

"It depends," Waters said. "It works in concentric circles. The force doesn't vary with the distance, you see. But it varies directly with the quantity and quality of the things to be destroyed. Ragweed, you see, is simple. With very little outlay of energy I could destroy all the ragweed in Brooklyn, though the output probably wouldn't be sufficient to reach across into Jersey as well. Today I held the output down and limited the destructive circle to about a hundred yards around."

"And the beetles?"

"They took longer, because they're higher on the scale. You can't kill elephants very easily with a .22 pistol, and it's the same way here. It took me longer to deal with the beetles. Rats, for example, would take even longer. But you grasp the general principle, don't you? Amplification of mental force, the striking power that lies latent within all of us, directed through my little machine at the intended victim."

"Sure," Sam nodded. "It all seems clear to me." He was surprised at his own casual tone. In ten years of feature-writing work, he had grown accustomed to suspend disbelief twice a day, three times on Sunday if need be, for the sake of a good story. He might have his own private reservations on the matter, but he never let them get between his mind and his typewriter fingers.

Well, this thing was a little more impossible than most. And, worst of all, he couldn't poke any holes in it. What was it the White Queen said? "Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." All it took was practice.

He looked down at his notes. Amplifier . . . mental force . . . latent striking power . . . boosts signal . . .

The scrawled fishhooks of his personal shorthand seemed to be leering obscenely at him. There was a question he wanted to ask, an important question, but it squatted annoyingly outside his consciousness, darting for cover whenever he aimed his mind at it. The uncatchable question nagged at him.

He decided to change the subject.

"Could you give me a little personal stuff now, Mr. Waters? Your background for this kind of work."

"My background? Nothing very much in the scientific sort of way. I'm just an amateur tinkerer, that's all."

"You have a job?"

"Had. I retired a couple of years ago to devote my time to tinkering."

"What kind of work were you in?"

"Accounting," Waters said. "I was a C. P. A."

Sam jotted it down, raising an eyebrow lightly. What would impel an ex-C. P. A. to go into something like this, he wondered? "Are you a New Yorker?"

"I'm originally from San Francisco," Waters said. "I've lived in Brooklyn for the last ten years."

"Might I ask how old you are?"

"Sixty," was the immediate answer.

Sam was surprised. "You look much younger than that," he remarked.

"So I'm told. But I don't feel much younger, Mr. Curry. Quite the contrary."

Sam said, "What gave you the notion of going into this line, anyway?"

Waters smiled gently. "It

interested me, is all. I thought I saw something valid, and I followed it up. It turned out I was right."

Sam glanced around the room. There was a copy of the *Star* lying on the desk. He said, "Has your machine had any previous publicity?"

"None at all. I obtained a patent on it last month, but I haven't published anything yet."

"Do you intend to?"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"How about commercial application? Something like this would be a goldmine."

Waters' face darkened. "I've thought of letting my device go into production, of course. But I'll have to wait and see. Do you think you'll be able to get a story out of me, Mr. Curry?"

"I'm sure of it. Probably a double-page spread in the Sunday section."

"Oh. How nice."

Something in Waters' inflection troubled Sam. It was as if he sounded disappointed about getting into print. Perhaps he was having some late regrets about having called in a reporter, Sam thought. Well, it was too late now. It would make a dandy story, even if no one believed it except the usual gullible Sunday-supplement suckers.

Sam rose. "I guess that's about all I'll need to know, Mr. Waters. If I run into any trouble working on the yarn, it's okay if I phone you here for more information, isn't it?"

"Of course."

Waters accompanied Sam to the front door. The big man's hand was twitching again, and Sam was willing to bet a week's pay that Waters would pour himself another belt of Scotch the moment the door closed. Well, at least Waters held the liquor well. He was probably a hypertense sort who needed the stuff to unknot his insides.

Sam backed the car out of the driveway and headed toward the downtown office of the *Star*. There was a hole in the Sunday supplement for the week after next, and, with any luck, Sam knew he could ram a couple of yards of copy about Waters into that blank space. Sunday stuff always meant a little extra on the paycheck because of syndication and such things.

Sam toyed with possible leads. *In the basement of his Boro Park home a soft-spoken retired accountant has put together an amazing device that promises relief from weeds and garden pests—*

Sam shook his head. Too

wordy. He tried again. *Hayfever and garden pests may go the way of the dinosaur, thanks to Jonathan Waters' amazing mental death-ray. The incredible gadget can—*

Uh-uh, Sam thought. Dead. Better to start off with a dialogue hook, some folderol with Waters demonstrating the doohickey, then fade into the factual pitch.

He pulled the car into the newspaper's parking-lot, tossed the keys to the attendant, and entered the building through the side office. It was half past two. He had the whole afternoon to bang out two or three thousand words on Jonathan Waters.

A pile of messages and the afternoon mail had accumulated on his desk during his absence. Sam stacked them all neatly together and dumped them into the "Pending" basket. Time to take care of them later, once the story was under way.

He switched on the typewriter, rolled a yellow sheet in, and pecked out at the top, *Curry: Mental Death Ray*. Skipping down to the middle of the page, he chewed his lip for a moment, then typed:

"'Watch those beetles die,' the tall, soft-spoken inventor

told me. As I peered down at the swarm of blue-green beetles infesting the garden, Jonathan Waters fumbled with the adjustments on his death-ray device.

"I held my breath, waiting, as—"

Sam paused, looking sourly at what he had written. It had to be jazzier, he thought. More death-ray stuff right at the beginning, more gadgetry.

But the typewriter remained silent. He made two or three more false starts in the next half hour. The other boys were giving him a wide berth; it was obvious by the pile of crumpled yellow sheets on the floor around him that he was getting nowhere, and they didn't want to disturb him.

Three-thirty came. Two desks down, the typewriter of Financial Editor Marty Chasin began to chatter as the final Stock Market figures came in. In the distance Sam heard the ticker clicking away.

It wasn't the noise that bothered him, though. He had written some of his best stories with howling chaos all around him.

After a while he saw what the trouble was. The trouble was Jonathan Waters and his crazy little gadget. It *couldn't* work. Mental death-rays were Sunday supplement stuff, all

right. Only this one *had* worked, or else Sam Curry had been gulled like a baby, and either way he wasn't pleased.

In ten years Sam had turned out a couple of million words of feature copy, more of it faked than not. But this was one story he didn't need to fake. It was already more fantastic than half the things he wrote about, only this one was legit. Or seemed to be from what he'd seen.

Sam scowled, ripped the page out of the machine, and started over for the twentieth time. He forced himself to grind out one page, two, a third. But it was coming hard. He was soaked in sweat, and his jaws ached from the way he'd been tensely grinding his teeth together as he wrote. And the stuff on the page still seemed dead as last year's weather forecasts. Something was missing, some vital point he was overlooking—

It came to him, all in a rush. It hit him like a club across the back of the neck.

There was a hole a mile wide in the interview, one all-important question that Sam had not asked. He hadn't asked it because his mind somehow had suppressed it, not even permitting him to

think of it. But it was logical, all right.

Sam thought about the chart rolled up in his desk at home, with its twenty-two year list of monthly victims, one villain a month sent to the grave as if marked for death and shot from afar. Twenty-two years of strokes, cerebral hemorrhages, blood clots, and other sudden, unpredictable fatal ailments.

Jonathan Waters' gadget was fine for killing unwanted pests. All you needed to do to kill Japanese beetles was to put a beetle or a photo of a beetle on the copper plate, and turn on the juice. All the beetles in the neighborhood died.

What would happen, Sam wondered, if you put the photo of a human being on the copper plate instead?

He sat there for a long couple of minutes, thinking the idea over, while his fingertips grew cold and his stomach started to squirm. Then he took the page out of the typewriter, added to it the two he had already written, and ripped them down the long way, then crosswise. He stuffed the fragments into his wastebasket, scooped up the crumpled yellow sheets lying all around the floor near his desk, and pushed them down

into the wastebasket too. He banged on the little bell at the edge of the desk and an eager copyboy came trotting up.

"Yes, Mr. Curry?"

"Charlie, empty my wastebasket, will you? I can't work with an overflowing basket."

The copyboy looked at him queerly, as if to say he could very well empty his own damn wastebasket, but obediently picked up the basket and bore it away. Sam felt better as he watched his half-finished story depart for the incinerator shaft.

That was one story, he thought, that he didn't dare write.

Suppose, he thought, that a man had a machine that could kill undetectably at long distance. Could kill anything—or *anyone*, at any range. Suppose that man had been quietly using that machine for a couple of decades to eliminate the men he thought the world would be better off without.

What sort of a man would do anything like that? A big hulking soft-spoken guy whose hands shook when he poured himself a drink? A man like that had appointed himself guardian angel for the world.

No, Sam thought. Guardian *devil*.

And yet this fellow had

phoned up a newspaper and asked a staffman to come out and look at his machine. He had prattled on about killing ragweed and Japanese beetles, all quite innocently. But Waters must have known that someone—perhaps the reporter, or else some reader of the published interview—would be bound to ask, "Can the machine kill anything *bigger* than beetles? Like people, maybe?"

Waters had certainly known that publication of the story would focus publicity on him. And, perhaps, expose him. But still he had voluntarily asked Sam to come out and see him. Why?

Sam looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to five. The men on the day shift were finishing up their stints. Bryan, the Night City Editor, had already arrived, and was prowling restlessly around the office even though he didn't take over the desk for another forty minutes. With a slightly quivering hand Sam pushed the switch on his typewriter to "Off" and slipped the hood over the machine.

He couldn't write the story of the weed-killer. Not yet. Not ever. But he had to see Waters again. It was risky, it was absurd, but he had to go out there and have a talk with

the big stoop-shouldered man. He had to ask the question he'd been too dumb to ask before.

Sam reached for the telephone. He had a sort of a date with a sort of a girlfriend, but that would have to wait, now. He dialed her office—she was a technical writer for a chemical outfit in Manhattan—and managed to get her on the phone.

"I was just on my way out, Sam. Is anything the matter?"

"It's about tonight, Lucy. I'm afraid I can't make it. I let myself get involved in a story, and now I'm stuck doing the followup tonight. I can't wiggle out."

"But the movie, Sam—"

She didn't sound terribly disappointed. Another time Sam might have felt hurt. Now he was pleased. "I hope you won't hold it against me, Lucy. If I could get free, you know I'd do it."

"Of course, Sam. Well, good night."

"Good night," he said in a flat voice, and dumped the receiver back into its cradle. She hadn't even asked him to reschedule the date for later in the week. He shrugged. There were plenty of girls in New York; when this Waters business was cleared up, there

would be time to make things up to Lucy, or else to find a new girl. One or the other, Sam thought.

He tidied up his desk and shut off the desk lamp. On his way out he passed the copy desk. The man in the slot was Henrichs, a good man, and he glanced up from the welter of half-written headlines all around the curved desk to nod at Sam, saying, "Leaving?"

Sam nodded. "Doing a followup. I got no work for your boys today, Will. Maybe tomorrow."

"Big story?"

"Yeah," Sam said quietly. "Big."

He elbowed his way into the newspaper parking lot, which was cluttered up with first-shift men trying to get their cars and go home, and by letting the attendant know that he was on a hot story he managed to get jumped over half a dozen of the others. He grinned at them with a cheerfulness he did not feel as he drove his battered '76 model out the lot past them.

The trip to Boro Park took nearly forty minutes through the rush-hour traffic. Sam concentrated on driving the car, rather than worrying about what he was going to say to Waters. When he finally pulled

up in the driveway of Waters' house at six o'clock, he had no idea at all of how he was going to begin the conversation. *Did you kill Permusjawarat and Ostrovsky and Leonardi and all the others with that machine of yours?* That wouldn't be a very subtle way to open the interview.

He stood on the scanner mat and waited for the red light to blink on. After nearly a minute had passed, he realized that the scanner wasn't working. Sam peered through the front window. The house was dark. Waters wasn't home.

Still, it was unusual for a man to turn his scanner off when he left the house. Didn't he want to know who had come calling in his absence? The scanner couldn't record anything if it was disconnected.

Unless, Sam thought suddenly, Waters had left the house permanently.

Tension knotted in the pit of Sam's stomach. He walked three feet to his left, to the scanner mat in front of the door to the upstairs apartment of the two-family house. The scanner light glowed, and through the speaker grid a woman's voice said, "Yes, please?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you. I'm looking for Mr. Waters,

but he doesn't seem to be here, and his scanner-record is turned off, so—"

"Oh. Are you from the moving company?"

Sam winced. "Ah—no. I'm a reporter for the *Star*," he said. "I interviewed Mr. Waters this morning, but I need some additional information."

"Mr. Waters left about four o'clock this afternoon. He said he was going west again and selling the house. The movers are supposed to pick up his furniture tonight or tomorrow morning."

"Oh," Sam said thinly. "I see. Thanks a lot."

He got back into his car, drove once around the block, and parked across the street to wait for the moving van. He felt worried and puzzled. At noon this afternoon the place hadn't looked as if its owner was planning to move out. Yet no more than two hours after Sam had left him, Waters had pulled up stakes and scrambled.

It was as if, Sam thought, Waters had deliberately baited a hook—calling Sam in, telling him some but not all of the story, letting Sam nibble, and then yanking up the line. Well, Sam thought, the bait had been taken. He was going

to follow Waters wherever the trail led.

By nine-fifteen Sam decided that the moving van would not show up at all this evening. He drove home, debated for a moment whether or not he should bother calling Lucy and trying to fix things up, and decided against it. Instead he pulled a book out of the bookcase, stared at the same page for an hour and a half, and went to bed. He didn't sleep well.

He had set the alarm for half past six, but he was up and listening for it for nearly an hour before it finally went off. A quick shower, a shave, and a skimpy breakfast, and he was on his way out by seven, having notified the office he might not be in till late that afternoon.

He drove out to Waters' place and parked across the street again. He waited. The woman from upstairs came down and went bustling off to market without noticing the waiting Sam. When she was out of sight, he crossed the street to the porch of the house and peered into Waters' front window. The furniture was still there. The moving van hadn't arrived yet.

It showed up, finally, at half past nine—a big orange van manned by two burly truck-

ers. The upstairs lady had returned by this time, and, presumably by prior arrangement, they rang her bell and got from her the key to Waters' apartment.

Sam carefully folded up a five-dollar bill, inserted it between the second and third fingers of his right hand, and crossed the street just as the movers unlocked Waters' front door.

"Hello," Sam said amiably. "My name's Sam Curry. I'm a reporter for the *Star*."

The movers glowered at him. "So?"

"I'm doing a story on the man who lives here. Seems he's quite an important guy. I wonder if you fellows would mind letting me have the address you're taking his stuff to." As he spoke, Sam reached out for the boss mover's hand, shook it, and left the five-dollar bill in it.

The big man peered curiously at the banknote for a minute. Then he unfolded it and handed it back to Sam.

"Sorry. Company rules."

"It can't hurt to give me his address, can it?"

"You want me to lose my job? I got four kids, buddy. I ain't getting myself canned for a lousy five-buck smear."

"Ten," Sam said.

"Now, look here—"

"Ten for you and five for your helper," Sam said recklessly.

The mover scowled. "You might as well say a million. How do I know you ain't a company man tryin' to test me? Uh-uh, pal. No addresses. Why don't you move along and let us get goin' with our work?"

Sam backed off, admitting defeat. The movers got to work loading their van, and Sam watched them glumly, wondering how he could get a glance at the bill of lading. Bribing the movers wasn't going to get him anywhere. But maybe a subtler approach would—

Squinting at the van across the street, he jotted down the company name emblazoned in purple letters along its side. *Acme Van & Storage Co. Any State in Continental U. S.*

A quick check of a phone book in a drugstore on the next corner revealed that the nearest Acme office was on Twelfth Avenue, not very far away. Sam drove over there, rummaged in his wallet, and found the calling-card he used on such occasions.

A well-lacquered secretary blinked at him as he entered the office. Sam said, "I'd like to see the manager, please."

He handed over the card that read *Bryant Collection Agency, Mr. David Cauldwell*. It was a real collection agency. And if anyone phoned up to find out whether a David Cauldwell actually worked for them, the answer would be yes. Cauldwell ran the place. But there was a reciprocal arrangement between Cauldwell and a couple of the *Star* men, which allowed Cauldwell to use the *Star* files occasionally and allowed *Star* reporters to pose as collection agents.

The lacquered secretary studied the card gravely for a couple of seconds, flashed a dazzling smile, and vanished into an inner office. A minute later she returned, handed Sam back his card, and said, "Mr. Donelli will see you in his office, sir."

Donelli's office had a Lorenzo de Medici look about it. Donelli himself, a lean little whippet of a man, rose like a coiled spring from the voluminous depth of a relaxochair and said nervously, "Please be seated, Mr. Cauldwell. Can I offer you a cigarette? If you press that button the back of the chair swings up. Yes, that's it."

Donelli was fluttering so tensely that Sam wondered how promptly he paid his own

bills. Smiling disarmingly, Sam said, "I'm not accustomed to such courtesy, Mr. Donelli. Generally when a skip-tracer shows up people look at him as if he were some kind of ghoul. Well, to business, at any rate." Sam dug into his brief case and produced a portfolio of blank paper. Riffing through it intently and taking care not to let Donelli see the pages, he said, "I'm here on behalf of five or six clients, for whom I've undertaken to locate a certain Mr. Jonathan Waters of this area."

Donelli frowned. "I don't believe there's anyone of that name working here."

"No, of course not. Mr. Waters is a client of Acme. You see, he left—ah—rather hurriedly yesterday, without—ah—notifying his creditors. Of which there are a number. This morning one of your vans was seen removing Mr. Waters' belongings. It occurred to us that perhaps you might be willing to disclose to us the address to which Mr. Waters' goods are being shipped."

Donelli toyed fussily with an unlit cigarette. "It's our practice to maintain such confidences, Mr. Cauldwell. You must realize that."

Sam realized it, yes. But he

also needed Waters' address. He wheedled and cajoled and bullied and lied, and, half an hour and six cigarettes later, he emerged from the Acme offices with the precious address. Donelli evidently had skeletons in his own closet, Sam thought. Sam had touched lightly on the possibility of being called in some day to try to collect from Mr. Donelli, and Mr. Donelli had relented and handed over the address.

Waters was having his goods shipped to Phoenix, Arizona, where they were going to be held in storage by Acme's warehouse there pending Waters' arrival.

Phoenix was the next stop, Sam thought. He phoned the *Star* office and told Michaelson that he was chasing a story and wouldn't be in for a couple of days, probably not till Monday. Michaelson swore, but Sam didn't let the city editor's blasphemies trouble him.

"Tell me what the story is, at least," Michaelson demanded.

"You'll find out when I get back."

"Sam, there are times when I ought to—"

"Fire me for insubordination. And I'll walk across the bridge into Manhattan and

get a job for twice the dough. So long, Les. See you on Monday."

Sam hung up. He wondered what would happen when he submitted an expense voucher for a round-trip flight to Arizona without explanation. He'd probably get the voucher bounced right back at him, he thought. Well, no use worrying about things like that now.

He phoned Idlewild Airport from the drugstore and discovered that there was an open spot on a plane leaving for Phoenix in two and a half hours. "It stops over for a pickup in Chicago, sir," the girl informed him. "Will that be all right?"

"That'll be fine," Sam told her.

By three that afternoon he was cruising at 35,000 feet in a smooth-flying passenger jet. By five-thirty—half past two, local time—he was blistering under the 105-degree temperature of Phoenix in the afternoon.

The local Acme office was a one-story building of plate glass and green stucco walls, with two fat palm trees out in front. The Acme manager, a tanned, roly-poly little man named Juarez, listened to Sam's skip-tracing story sympathetically and said, "Yes, I

received the papers by trans-fax yesterday. The truck won't be here for a couple of days yet, you understand."

"Yes, of course. All I want to know is where I can find Waters. Didn't he give you a local address?"

Juarez shrugged expressively. "The papers simply say hold in storage here. There's no delivery address. Most likely he isn't settled yet."

"Most likely," Sam agreed. He put a ten dollar bill down on the desk and said, "I'll be staying in Phoenix for a couple of days. Would you be good enough to get in touch with me whenever Waters shows up to claim his stuff?"

The bill disappeared into a desk drawer. Juarez was less reticent about bribery than some Acme employees, evidently. "Certainly. Where can I reach you?"

"What's a good local hotel?"

Juarez named one. Sam nodded. "Okay. I'll be there. The name is Cauldwell, David Cauldwell."

Sam left the office, stepped out into the blazing oven outside, and had a cab take him to the place Juarez had recommended—a flossy-looking pastel-colored affair with the usual palms and cactus garden out front.

Since he had to check in

under the Cauldwell name, Sam knew he'd be unable to use his credit card in settling the bill. At \$15 a day, payable in cash, he hoped Waters did not take long in arriving on the scene.

Two days slipped expensively by. Sam bought a swimsuit—he had left New York too quickly to bring one along—and spent the days lolling in the hotel pool. He struck up friendships with hotel guests and told them elaborate and fictitious tales of his life as a skip-tracer. He spent the evenings in the hotel cocktail lounge consuming bourbon and ogling the pretty barmaids. He began to toy with the idea of throwing the whole thing up and flying back to New York, but he knew that was impossible. A rolled-up chart in his desk, with its long list of martyrs inscribed in blue ink, nagged at him. He thought of glossy beetles curling up and dying, and thought of Prijak Permusjawarat struck down in the Sumatran street. He knew he could not return home until he had found Waters.

But Sam concocted fantasies of Waters' whereabouts. Waters had not come west at all, Sam thought; merely shipped his goods, while re-

maining deceptively in a Brooklyn hotel room. Or perhaps he was taking a circuitous route out, by way of Canada perhaps, and would not arrive in Phoenix to claim his furniture for months. All sorts of ideas circulated in Sam's mind, none of them cheerful.

On Saturday morning his room phone rang. He picked up the receiver and heard Juarez say, "I got a letter from him today, Mr. Cauldwell. He's in San Francisco."

"What?"

"He's staying there for a while. He sent me a check to cover storage of his goods for the next three weeks."

Sam came fully awake. "Did he include a return address?"

"Indeed, yes. And if you'll come down to the office, I'll be glad to give it to you."

Sam realized morosely what was expected of him. He taxied across town to the Acme office, unsubtly forked over another tenspot, and for consideration received was permitted to copy the address on Waters' envelope: the Hotel St. Clare, on Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco.

Sam phoned the airport, was told that there was a vacancy on the next flight to

San Francisco, and that they'd hold it for him until an hour before flight time. That gave him an hour and a quarter to tidy up his affairs in Phoenix. But it took less time than that for "Mr. Cauldwell" to pay his hotel bill, pack his one small suitcase, and board an airport-bound cab. By one o'clock he was in the air. An hour later, he was in an airport limousine heading northward up the peninsula to downtown San Francisco.

The limousine's first stop was a hotel just off Market Street. Sam got out, inquired at the desk, and found that they had a room for him. He registered under his own name, dropped off his luggage in the room, and took a cab to the Hotel St. Clare.

The trip took twenty minutes through the mid-afternoon traffic. Sam watched the taxi meter gyrate with a mounting sense of discomfort. So far he had sunk better than two weeks' take-home pay into this jaunt, with no very positive hope of being reimbursed by the paper. Now that the chase was nearing what he hoped was its finish, he started to have fresh doubts about the wisdom of the whole thing.

Suppose, he asked himself, my whole premise is cockeyed? Suppose Waters' gad-

get is just what he says it is, a gimmick for killing weeds and garden pests. What then?

The other side of that proposition was even more disturbing. If Waters *did* have the power to kill at long range, he might have other powers as well. The power to detect and destroy a pursuer, for example. Sam began to sweat. He half expected a clammy hand to tighten round his heart at any moment.

But he reached the hotel without incident. The cabbie peered at him quizzically as he paid the fare; Sam wondered if he looked as green outside as he felt within at the moment. He tried to summon some confidence. After all, he'd been bargaining in on people for ten years now.

The Hotel St. Clare had obviously seen better days. It looked as if it had been built in the early part of the century, and wasn't holding up too well. Sam entered the dimly lit lobby with its threadbare wine-colored carpet and its potted snakeplants, and asked the desk clerk about Waters.

Yes, Mr. Waters was registered here. And no, he hadn't seen Mr. Waters all day. Mr. Waters was probably upstairs, room 880, elevator to the left.

No questions asked. Sam

thanked the man and entered the elevator on watery knees. He punched eight; self-service elevator. He got out on the eighth floor, followed the arrows, found himself much too quickly in front of a room whose door said 880.

Sam knocked.

As he waited he found himself hoping Waters would not be in the room. No such luck; he heard footsteps, then the doorhandle started to turn. Sam wondered what in the world he was going to say when—

He was face to face with Waters.

The big man looked older, tired, gray-faced. He mustered a warm smile. He did not look at all surprised. He said, "Hello there, Curry! I've been hoping to see you. Won't you come in?"

The room looked like any other cheap hotel room. It had a bed, a dresser, a closet, a lamp. A few books lay scattered on the bed. On the little night-table next to the bed sat a familiar black box about the size of a large camera.

Sam took a seat at the little glass-topped desk near the window. Waters sat on the edge of the bed and continued to smile. "You don't know how glad I am to see you," he said.

"Is it all right if I call you Sam?"

"Sure," Sam said mechanically. A thousand questions pinwheeled through his mind at once. Making an effort, he separated one question from all the rest and forced it out: "You got out of town in a hurry, all right. How come?"

"I decided it was time to leave."

"Why?"

"In case you actually wrote up that interview with me and had it published," Waters said. "If something like that got into the papers, I might get more attention than I would like. So I left New York City."

"You left it two hours after I interviewed you."

"That's right. Is the interview going to be published?"

Sam shook his head. "No. I never wrote it up."

"I'm relieved to hear that."

"If you're so relieved," Sam said, "how come you invited me out to interview you in the first place?"

Waters made a tired shrugging motion with his heavy shoulders. "Because I wanted to show you my machine. I took a calculated risk. I gambled and I won."

Sam frowned. "Meaning what?"

"You'll understand soon

enough, I hope. Suppose you tell me something. Why did you trace me to San Francisco?"

"Because I forgot to ask you one question at that interview."

"Just one question? And for that you followed me across the continent?"

"It's a pretty big question," Sam said.

Waters shut his sad eyes wearily for a moment. He said, "All right. Go ahead and ask it."

Sam's throat was dry and his voice was hoarse. "You showed me that your machine could kill weeds and beetles. You said it could kill rats with a bit of extra effort. What I want to know is—" he paused for an instant— "what *else* can it kill? Say, how about killing human beings?"

Waters didn't flinch at the sudden question. He remained quite still, smiling enigmatically. After a moment he rose, went to the closet, and unzipped a brown leather suitcase. Taking out a single sheet of paper, he closed the closet door and returned to Sam. He handed him the piece of paper.

"Do these names mean anything to you, Sam?"

Sam's eyes went to the bottom of the sheet. In neat capital letters someone had print-

ed *Prijak Permusjawarat*. There was a checkmark in red ink next to the name. Fifty or sixty names preceded Permusjawarat's on the sheet. Each name bore its red checkmark, and each of the names was one that Sam was familiar with. The list duplicated the tail-end of his own chart without deviation.

Sam realized his hands were shaking almost as badly as Waters'. He put the sheet down on the desk. He said, "All these men are dead. They've dropped dead in the last three or four years, one a month."

"I have an earlier list just this long," Waters said. "It covers the years from 1972 to 1978. All told I'm responsible for 116 deaths. But there isn't a court in the world that could prove it."

"You used the machine?"

"Yes," Waters said quietly. "I used the machine."

Sam realized he should be feeling intense hatred for the big man, should be feeling the righteous wrath of any person who had just learned that another human being had deigned to take upon himself the right of life and death. But all he felt was deep curiosity. Why? Why?

He eyed the black box on

the night-table with chilly fascination. "How is it done?"

"I can use a photograph, or a letter, or anything else that will focus the machine on the victim. Killing a human isn't like killing beetles, though. I can accumulate a charge lethal enough to kill beetles within twenty minutes. Weeds need only five minutes. But it takes a full month to build up enough charge to kill a human being."

Which explained, Sam thought, why there had only been one victim a month over the years.

He said, "In the interview you implied you had just built the machine recently. But by your own admission you've been using it at least ten years. When did you really build it?"

"I *didn't* build it," Waters said. "What's more, I don't have any idea what's inside the chassis. A man named McDermott built the machine, in 1959 or 1960. McDermott committed suicide in 1964, and the machine came into the possession of somebody named Halsey. Halsey died in 1969, handing the machine on to a person named Blake. Blake gave it to me in '72, and I've had it ever since."

Sam nodded. 1960, 1964, 1969, 1972. Yes, that was

right. In each of those years there was a gap on his chart.

"It sounds as if owning the machine is unhealthy," Sam said. "Three out of four owners died."

"It isn't owning it that's dangerous," Waters said, "It's *operating* it that kills you, sooner or later. You see, the charge builds up every month automatically. If the operator doesn't focus the discharge on someone else, it backfires and kills *him*. But so far that's never happened. The operators have never come to that point of fatal inaction. It's simply that you can't play God for five or ten years without having something happen to your soul. And finally, no matter how convinced you are that what you've been doing was right, you can't face the guilt any more. So you die."

Waters rose, took a bottle from a shelf, and poured a stiff jolt into a water glass. He did not offer Sam a drink. Sam stared at the gaunt, hollow-eyed, suddenly old man with the same cold curiosity with which he might have watched a cobra about to strike.

"How did all this start?" Sam asked.

"McDermott built a machine. I don't know anything about McDermott except that

he was an intuitive genius who fooled around with a lot of strange stuff, and suddenly realized that he'd built a machine that could kill people. It's quite a power to stumble over. McDermott came very close to blowing his brains out the day he knew what he had built."

"But he didn't blow his brains out."

"Not at the start. He looked around at the world—this was 1959, back in the Nightmare Years—and decided that the world was going to hell in a handbasket, that unless someone did something and did it fast America and Europe and Asia were going to be smoking slagheaps in a year or two. But he believed humanity didn't *want* to blow itself up. He wondered what would happen if he used his machine to eliminate some of the stumbling-blocks on the way to peace. Yes, I know, you look shocked. You ought to be.

"McDermott invented all sorts of rationalizations. Said that it didn't matter, that the men he had picked out would undoubtedly be dead in the atomic war soon enough, but why should the rest of us be doomed too? He had all sorts of fancy hairsplitting excuses for what he was thinking of

doing. But finally he realized that he didn't have any choice. He worked out the equations, saw the backlash effect, and knew that he could do one of three things: smash the machine, use it on someone else, or sit back and wait for the machine to kill him.

"He used the machine. Then he let it recharge and the following month he used it again. And the month after that. You know who his victims were. Sometimes he guessed wrong. But generally he was removing the obstructions. When the U. N. Security Council killed the veto clause, he knew he was on the track, and so was the world. He kept at it.

"He kept at it for almost five years, until he couldn't bear playing God any more. He knew that he was killing men who might be sincere, who might honestly think they were serving mankind even while they were helping to destroy it—and finally he couldn't take it any more. But he had seen it happening to him for several years, and he'd been looking for a man to take over his work. He found him, told the whole story, handed over the machine—and put a bullet through his own head."

"And then it was Halsey's turn to run the machine?"

Waters nodded. "And after

four and a half years Halsey jumped out of a twenty-story window, after he had handed the machine on to Blake. Blake lasted three years before it finished him. By that time, he had found *his* successor. Me."

"You've had it the longest, haven't you?"

"Ten years," Waters said in that oddly thin voice of his. "I've seen the world become a safe place, a place where you can plan your life a month ahead without having to wonder if you'll be blown up before then. So I know the machine is justified. But there are some powers men aren't ready to handle, and this is one of them. I've been holding lightning in my hand for ten years. I can't go on any longer."

Waters fell silent. Sam thought he could hear the loud thumping of his own heart in the silence. Suddenly, perhaps minutes later, the implications of what Waters had just said sank in.

He could not go on any longer.

Sam said, "Why did you ask me to interview you?"

"I saw my time coming," Waters said. "I knew I couldn't hold on any longer, that next month or the month after I might jump out a win-

dow or cut my throat or just let the backlash from the machine kill me. So I sent for you. I've been watching you almost a year, Sam. I knew all about that chart you've been keeping."

"How—"

"It doesn't matter how. I knew. So I sent for you, and you came. And I showed you the machine, Sam. I used it on weeds and beetles and I left you to draw your own conclusions. I was taking a risk. I said there was a patent on the machine, but there isn't; I couldn't dare patent it, even if I knew how it worked. And if you had written a story about me and published it, I would have had to destroy the machine and then myself."

"But I didn't write the story."

"No. You came after me, found my trail and followed me across the country. I had hoped you'd do that, Sam. Because you're the one. The one I want to follow me."

The words cut like whiplashes into Sam's mind. He had seen them coming, but he had tried to pretend to himself that he was wrong.

Now there was no need to pretend.

Sam tried to speak. No words came out.

Waters smiled wearily. "The job will kill you, Sam, the way it's killed all the rest of us. You may last a year, or ten years like me, or maybe more than that. But eventually the job will kill you. Only someone has to do it, for the good of all the rest, and I've picked you. I'm sorry, Sam. I really am."

The big man rose, walked unsteadily to the closet, and took a book from his suitcase. "This is McDermott's notebook, Sam. It'll tell you all you need to know about using the machine. You understand what might happen to you if anyone ever gets a look at this notebook."

Sam said hoarsely, "And you—are you—going to—"

"To die?" Waters chuckled. "I'm dead already, Sam. I've had poison in me ever since I took that drink, half an hour ago. Slow poison. I'm going to go to sleep now. I won't wake up. I'm taking a mountain off my shoulders and putting it on yours, and for the first time in ten years I know what peace is."

"You haven't even asked me if I agree," Sam said.

"I'm not going to ask you. Sit here for a while and think it over. A quick decision would be wrong. I'm asking you to become the guardian of man-

kind, Sam. But I'm also asking you to become a monster."

"A guardian devil," Sam said.

Waters nodded. "You hate taking life. Your soul rebels at this whole terrible idea. Which means you're just like McDermott and Halsey and Blake and me. You're the only sort of man who could do the job."

Sam did not reply. Waters stretched out on the bed, his feet dangling over the edge. He kicked off his shoes, gave a little sigh of comfort, and closed his eyes. Within minutes his breath was rising and falling with calm, metronomic regularity.

The sleep of a man at peace, Sam thought.

It was late in the day, and the late-afternoon fog was swirling in, bringing with it the gray, windy twilight. Sam shivered involuntarily. He looked at the sleeping, peaceful Waters, then at the machine on the night-table, then down at the dingy carpet.

He had been handpicked by the man now dying on the bed. Chosen to carry on the monstrous work of killing.

He saw the choices in front of him. He could open the window, hurl the machine eight stories to the street, and try

to forget. Or he could take the machine, allow it to charge itself on whatever strange impulse from his mind it used to kill, and let it destroy him.

Or he could accept the dread mantle of McDermott and Halsey and Blake and Waters, become a remote-control assassin, striking down those he marked for death.

Sam tiptoed across the room and picked up the machine. It was oddly light, and cold to the touch. Suddenly, he smiled. For ten years he had been an obscure staffman for an obscure telefax sheet. Now he could change the world, guide it, aid it.

The burden would crush him, eventually. But it was worth it to shoulder the load even for a little while—a year, five years, a decade.

He put the machine under one arm, McDermott's notebook under the other.

The power was his: to shape the world, to nudge it along its destined path.

His ultimate victim would be himself, in that future day when he could no longer abide the power that was his. But before that day came, he hoped, he would have used his power wisely and well.

Clutching the box tightly, he walked out into the fog-swept street.

THE END

THE CONVENTION

A Fable For Our Time

By EDE WITT

Fable can be dangerous ground for a writer. It takes a sure touch to steer between heavy-handedness and coyness. In this stirring tale a new writer does a masterful—and thought-provoking—job.

I WAS standing high in the Sierra in the twilight shadow of some pines. Yet it was much more than the Sierra. Beyond the granite slopes stretched desert and jungle. Among the fir and pine were deodar and banyan trees. Around the woods were fields and prairie grass and salt sea marsh. At the crest, lay a snow-edged lake; but below were beach and tide and ocean sea.

The living things were holding a convention to decide what they should do with man. They called the roll and my breath swelled up to answer Here!, but they proceeded to the rules, the main one being that during the convention no delegate could eat another delegate.

Redwood was the chairman.

"We have been patient," Redwood said. "Give him a million more years, we hoped. But there is not time. Man has fastened time to his bombs and his warheads. He has made death the purpose of his life and even his death creates only death.

"But the nature of life is to live.

"What shall we do with man before he destroys us all and all memory of joy and love and life?"

Mouse dashed onto the slab of granite in the clearing in the trees.

"It is too late for talk!" he cried, up on his haunches and beating his chest. "Are we men or are we mice? I say, War to the death! Exterminate man!"

There were great cheers and cries—flurrying, splashing, crackling in the brush, thumping on the ground.

"I'll carry plague to his cities!"

"I will destroy his farms!"

"I will infect his water!"

"I will invade his body!"

"War to the death!"

"Death to the war!"

Lion thundered on the rock and stood with body flowing.

"I will come out of the jungle to eat my meat."

"I will come out of the desert," said Rattler.

"I will come out of the seas," said Shark.

"I will stop making food!" cried Grass.

Bear clambered onto the speaking rock and rose to his hind legs.

"Hurray for Bear!"

"Hurray!"

"Hurray!"

Bear bowed. "I will steal the berries from their breakfast cereal and the raisins from their borsch. I will hug their little children to death and caress the mamas and papas with my dainty claws . . ."

He looked up at the sudden swoop of wings.

"Are you an American Bear or a Russian Bear?" screamed Eagle, and soared and circled.

The convention was thrown into confusion. Round and round chased dog and cat and bird and flea. Round and round chased smelt and salmon. Round and round chased wolf and sheep.

"I do not trust you, Bear!" cried Eagle. "You do not believe in feathers. Everything you say is propaganda. Will you agree to an inspection system? Will you meet me at the summit, Bear?"

From the pond, came the mad laughter of the Loon and up and back along the shore screeched Laughing Gull.

Bear dropped to all fours and swung his head.

"Are you Russian or American, Eagle? I am Bear as you are Eagle as man is man." He walked sadly off the rock and then stood on his hind feet again. "Would our problem not be the same?"

Out of the sea leaped Dolphin. She shone like joy in the moonlight. Her voice was gentle as water.

"How beautiful we are," she said, diving and leaping. "How beautiful the world we live in. How good it is to be alive!"

Elephant broke through the trees and flung his trunk and trumpeted. "You sound like a convention of men, discussing how to save the world by de-

stroying it! How to have peace by making war!

"If man destroys himself with atomic war, he destroys us. But if we destroy man, we destroy ourselves.

"Extermination is the problem—not the solution to the problem."

He dipped his trunk into the pond and let the water shower on his back.

Lamb gambolled from its mother, dancing in the moonlight, and came up short in front of Lion. The two confronted one another. I held my breath, as if the turning earth had paused. For what if Lion were to lie down now with Lamb, now, right now, and peace be in the world? But Lion cleared his throat as if to speak, but did not speak, and Lamb ran bleating to his mother.

Worm thrust one end above the ground.

"Doesn't he want to find out how it comes out in the end, before he turns it off?"

"We don't have centuries," murmured Snail, leaving a track of slime across the rock.

Gibbon swung from the trees with joyous yells, her baby clinging to her chest, and dropped sedately to the speaking rock. "When I look at man I think, *There, but for*

the grace of man's gods, go I."

She paused to make sure this was recorded in the minutes. "I have been cloistered in a zoo a good part of my life, devoted to the study of man. And so far as I can figure out, it is simply the power of speech. *Kill first*, he says. *Speak afterward.*"

The baby jumped up on her mother's shoulder and began bowing left and right before the assemblage.

"I think the evidence is clear," continued Gibbon rapidly, "that man is a mistake. Evolution clearly intended to stop. But I am confident. And I assure you. And I make a motion to that effect. And if elected, I will. Do I hear a second? And furthermore. To each and every one of you. I thank you."

There were cheers from all over.

"I second it!" shouted Chimpanzee, stomping his feet.

"What is your motion, Gibbon?" asked Redwood.

"I move that man be banished from the earth."

"Ungrammatical!" cried Chimpanzee.

"Gibberish!" sneered Gorilla.

"That man *vanish* with a *v*," said Chimpanzee.

"Do you want to reword

your motion?" asked Redwood.

"Banish with a B," said Gibbon, busily grooming her baby. "Although the derivation may be the same."

"How will you do that?" asked Louse.

"Pass a law," said Gibbon, grasping her right thumb with her left foot. "We hereby pass a law of nature that earth is for living on. Man is hereby banished from the earth and he will kindly take his wars and stockpiles with him."

"We don't want him in the oceans!"

"We don't want him in the air!"

"There are millions of other worlds . . ." said Gibbon.

"I'm opposed!" cried Louse. "Wherever man goes, I'll be on him. And there I'll be with the bombs again."

"Perhaps that is the price we have to pay," said Gibbon.

"Me, too," said Flea.

"And billions of me."

"And me."

"But I'm a living thing!" cried Louse.

"And the whole thing will start all over again," said Snake.

"And end," said Mule.

There was gloom. Not a sound. Not a flutter. The moon

was sliding down the sky toward the snow and rock above the lake. I found myself gone limp. Despair. Aching with the hope that they really would come on a solution.

Then in the olive tree within arm's reach, Dove began to murmur.

"If you have nothing to say, don't say it," mumbled Mule.

"I do have something to say," said Dove.

"Then say it," said Bat.

"Is anybody listening?" asked Dove.

"Say it," said Hawk.

"Will it do any good?" murmured Dove.

"Say it," said Skunk.

"Can you hear me?" asked Dove.

"Say it," said Jaguar.

"What did you say?" cried Falcon.

"I didn't hear you," said Jackal.

"Out of order!" bellowed Bull.

"I didn't even mention it," said Dove, and hid her head beneath her wing.

"Please, ladies and gentlemen, please," said Redwood. "Let's stick to the business of the convention."

"I didn't say it," murmured Dove. "And no one heard me anyway."

Deer ran to the speaking rock. "I don't know what all

the crash and clatter is about. The thing to do with man is to ignore him. There's no problem if you just ignore it."

"Oh, Deer," said Quail. "How can you ignore a loaded gun?"

"Hunting season doesn't last forever. And when it's over, life goes on."

"It seems to me," remarked Spider loudly, "I've spun many a web on antlers mounted on a wall."

Deer chewed his lip. "But there are bound to be survivors on both sides."

"And dead ducks," said Duck.

"But there always are survivors."

"And filet mignon with mushrooms," said Steer.

"And bacon and eggs for Sunday breakfast," added Pig.

"But some survive," said Deer.

"I'm for ignoring," said a voice like a cave. "I wouldn't recognize a man if I saw one. And I have yet to see one." It was Yeti. He made his way with giant strides to the speakers' rock. "All I have seen are some footsteps in the snow, but I can't believe that such a creature as you describe exists. Anyone who has climbed the mountains where I live and looked out on the universe could not imagine

the thing you speak of here as war. I vote for non-recognition."

"I second it," said Ant, scurrying out from under Yeti's foot. "I'm all for going on with the important things in life. We'll be here long after man is gone."

"Oh, Ant," said Sparrow sadly. "There are two and a half billion of them on the earth."

"That's not so many. I've seen their man-heaps."

"But even the lowliest creature . . ." said Sparrow. "Don't you know the saying—*and every man who falls* . . . Could you bear to hear the bell toll two and a half billion times? Children and babies, too, with their naked necks and their mouths wide open waiting to be fed, and trusting all of us, and eager to be alive . . . And pouf . . . How can you ignore suffering anywhere in the world?"

"It isn't hard," said Ant. "Keep busy. Keep busy all the time—just with the busyness of living. Move one grain of sand and another grain of sand. And besides, I can't identify myself with man, somehow. I've never really known a whole man all at once."

"Aren't you curious?" ask-

ed Sparrow. "Don't you think you might learn something—like bird-baths and bread-crumbs?"

"Oh, Sparrow," sighed Ant. "We ants have achieved the highest civilization the earth has ever seen. We make war and keep slaves. What can we learn from man?" Ant hurried off and disappeared into the dust.

Anteater pushed his snout along Ant's trail. "A very interesting point of view," he muttered. "Most commendable speech. May I congratulate you. It was indeed a privilege and an honor . . ."

Above flew Ladybird. "The Aphids, Ant. We can't ignore the Aphids, can we, Ant?"

Hawk hovered over Sparrow and from the cliff the baby hawks cried, "Mamma, feed us, mamma!"

Sparrow flew to her nest. Her babies whimpered, "Feed us, Mamma, feed us!" She flew down to the marsh where reeds were heavy-bent with seed.

"What did you do, Reed?" said Sparrow, making conversation, "when they found Moses in the bullrushes?"

"Sparrow!" called Hawk, her talons curled. "You have given me much food for thought!"

The convention seemed to be disintegrating. I felt the little pieces shredding up inside of me. Delegates moved nervously about, chatting with those they might be eating. Some began meticulously to groom themselves. Others appeared to doze.

Crocodile croaked. "Amendment to the motion. The status quo completely. No recognition beyond the Age of Reptiles. No birds, no mammals." He eased himself back in the mud.

"Crocked!" cried Peacock, fanning out his tail.

"Bats in his belfry!"

Was that all there was? Each in his own round of life, round and round and round, not recognizing any other but substance to be consumed, food or enemy. Exterminate, banish, ignore. We are too busy, it is too much, we will survive.

Nothing would be nothing and the dawn would dawn but I would not awake because this was no dream and nothing would awake or dream. Only the man-made satellites would speed around the empty poisoned earth, their instruments recording and recording.

I looked up in surprise at the speaker on the rock. It

was a Unicorn and I knew that Unicorns did not exist.

"You're being much too anthropomorphic about man," it began. "If man is part of nature, then anything he does is in accordance with nature's laws. If it is human nature to devote its time and brain and energy to atomic weapons, to destroy itself by war, to kill its children and its children's children, to blast and burn the earth and all the living things on it, and all the centuries of life that went before and might come after—then that is human nature—that is nature."

I wanted to cry out, *It is a myth!* But everybody listened, silent, in a trance.

"We have no right to call it wrong or evil or thoughtless or criminal or insane. Remember how long it was for Earth itself to form and change; how long, how hard before a speck of life could struggle to existence. And all that went into the making of a man. And for what purpose?"

"This wondrous being who can control his destiny, who has the knowledge to make life more tolerable for all men on earth . . . This wondrous being who harnesses the energy of unseen atoms and reaches out to other worlds a million million years away . . .

This being who has the power of choice; who can say, *Shall we destroy the world or shall we give ourselves another billion years to see what we can do?*

"If man is now to wipe it out, why is that not the culmination of nature's long design? Why do you condemn man for being what he is?"

There was silence as the Unicorn slowly vanished like the fadeout on a screen. Each one was turned, immobile, toward the vacant air above the speaking rock.

Only Dove had anything to say.

"Peace," she said. "Peace, peace, peace, peace, peace."

But the Unicorn still seemed to stand there in the empty space.

"Peace," murmured Dove. "Peace, peace."

"We've got to hide!" cried Mole.

"Go underground!" screeched Gopher.

"Hole up!"

"Evacuate!"

"And run!"

"And flee!"

Birds beat their wings and could not fly. Fish leaped out of the water and fell gasping on the ground. Animals scurried, clawing at the earth, climbing on each other's

bodies with grunting, heaving breaths. Plants swayed and pulled, like rooted runners in a dream.

The cries, the noise, the gasping breath pressed close upon me. Where could I hide except in my own skin? Where could I run except in the direction man was going?

I crouched down and touched my fingers to the earth and spread my hands wide on the earth and dug my fingers down and held and held and held on tight. The Earth, I felt the earth. The Earth went spinning into space.

"Peace," said the Dove. "Peace. Peace," said the Dove as she hovered above.

There was no answer. There was the quiet of exhaustion.

And then the slow cool voice of Turtle.

"Who wants to hide from peace?" he said. "Who wants to run from peace?" And stuck his neck out of his shell, his bright eyes gleaming. "Why does a Turtle cross the road?" he asked.

"To get on the other side," said Goose.

"Right!" said Turtle. "But why does he want to get on the other side?"

"No one ever asks that," said the Little Red Hen.

"That's not part of the riddle."

"I'll tell you, though," said Turtle. "One—he wants to see what the other side of the road is like when he's on it. And two—he wants to see what his own side's like from the other side."

"But it's all the same road," said Burro.

"That's the point. It's all the same road," said Turtle.

"But where does it lead?" asked Horse.

"I've seen them," said Lamb, "getting into line and following along, not knowing where they were being led, not finding out . . ."

"Would you please repeat the riddle?" asked Yak.

" . . . repeating everybody else's bleat," continued Lamb. "Just following the tail ahead—up to a small risk and up to a calculated risk and teetering on the brink and down the chute and into the slaughter . . ."

"Yes," said Turtle. "But isn't this just as much man's problem as ours? Why do we keep talking to ourselves? Where is man at this convention? What has he to say?"

I had no breath. The tension strangled up in all of us. The moon was gone. The stars were fading. The air was gray and luminous.

"I propose therefore," said Turtle, "that this Convention invite man to talk with us and negotiate a pact for continued life on earth."

"Talk to man!" cried Parakeet. "What good is talk?"

"So long as we keep talking . . ." answered Bear.

Suddenly the sky burst brighter than the sun. The whole earth shook and sound smashed against the rocks. I felt the fragile life inside of me. I felt life tremble all around. I watched the cloud begin to mushroom up above us.

"So long as we keep talking," repeated Bear, "at least we are not eating one another, nor are we destroying."

I could not stand to be in

hiding and alone. I walked out from the shadows and they saw me and they stirred with wariness. I was frightened in my courage. I was in great danger, walking toward them, for the eagle has talons and the bear has claws; the bull has horns and the dragon breathes fire. My enemies were among them, yet I was one of them and we were all in danger. I felt the fragile earth beneath my feet. And I breathed the sweet pure piney honey-scented air with the lovely lethal cloud above us.

They were walking towards me, slowly, and they were in great danger also, for I was man. I was enemy and they were part of me and I of them, for we were life.

THE END

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Subject: Questionnaire

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-
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EDITORIAL

(Continued from page 6)

On the basis of these and similar investigations, it is not unlikely that some means will eventually be found to take memories from one brain and transmit them electrically to another. Reels of such adventures will be available for rent.

The danger is obvious: A nation of passive voyeurs, uninterested in art, science, or government.

And there will be, inevitably, an enormous illicit traffic in erotic and sadistic reels. Many men and women will record their amorous adventures. Youngsters, if unwatched, may not be spear-fishing in Pacific at all—instead they may be on an orgy in Rome, or luxuriating in a Middle East harem.

Fantastic? No more so than today's wonders. The really sad part is that when the first model is produced a few voices will rise in protest, to be drowned out in the clamor of those who rush to buy—to yield up life for its lovely, hateful counterfeit.



MORE LIKE HOME

By RAYMOND E. BANKS

Strange what you can see in a picture if you put your mind in it. Not "to it." In it.

THE girl in the picture was looking at someone.

"Very odd," said Doctor Wales to his patient. He stared at the picture on the study wall behind Mr. Borden. "A very realistic picture, Mr. Borden, and yet—strange. It's quite unusual."

Mr. Borden, tired and wan in a faded green bathrobe, had a face that wrinkled like a prune. His eyes faded at the edges with age. But his voice was sprightly enough.

"I'd appreciate it, Dr. Wales, if we confined the discussion to the subject of my health."

Wales sighed and turned from the oil painting. "Very well. But I'm interested in Callistan art. That picture was done on one of the moons of Jupiter, was it not?"

Borden sighed. "Yes, it was."

Wales pointed to the center area. "It looks like the artist made a mistake when he got to the center of the room. There's a painted-over place there."

Borden looked amused. "I can see that you know little about the paintings of the Silvermen," he said. "They're a race of artists. They don't make mistakes. Their art is highly developed—they claim only men make mistakes. For instance, what color is the girl's hair?"

Wales peered at the picture.

"Red, or rather brown . . . a sort of a—"

Borden laughed. "Let's get back to something you know a little about. She's a blonde,

Doctor, of course. Now about my health."

Wales turned his mind off the picture with an effort. "I must tell you that there are strong traces of radioactive disease." He hesitated, but Borden's strong chin told him that the truth would be appreciated. "Your chances are—not good."

Borden looked a little shocked for a second. Then he seemed to recover. There was a near-grin in his weak, old eyes. "The chances of a man at seventy are never good."

Going out of the house, Dr. Wales found his mind returning to the picture. Borden was right. The girl in the picture *was* a blonde when you looked real close.

Dr. Wales felt his hands tremble with excitement. Very odd.

"Keep him in bed, Mrs. Borden. If he wakes and seems restless, more sedative. That's all for now."

Mrs. Borden was many years her husband's junior. She looked down on the pale face in the bed. She didn't seem quite moved enough to Wales.

"I'll do that," she said. There was a book turned down on the table. Evidently she'd been reading when the

attack came. She sidled towards the book. "Anything else?"

Wales frowned. "No. Just watch him carefully. Oh, may I use his study to make some notes?"

"Certainly, Doctor."

"You devil!" said Wales in admiration. The girl in the picture ignored him. She was looking at someone. Only she really didn't ignore Wales; she seemed to be aware of him out of the corner of her eye.

The picture was quite large—three or four feet long and proportionately wide. It was framed tastefully in mahogany. The artist's oils protruded from the surface when you looked close, but at eighteen inches or farther away, it was perfect. The artist had been effective with his imagery. The overall effect was a woman, or girl, in some kind of dark room. The darkness emphasized the living figure of the girl, conventionally and even old-fashionedly dressed—but the flesh tones were excellent. She faced three-quarters full into the room, and the lines of her body turned with an eerie grace. As Wales let his eyes study her, the flow of his gaze seemed to make her move. Even her bosom seemed to move in breathing.

Then with a shock Wales realized that she wasn't in a room at all. She was in a dark place in the woods. What had looked like a rug was a silver-gushing stream. When he had first seen the picture, her hand had rested on a bedpost. Now he saw it was a fencepost—of a decayed, forgotten fence, off in some secret meeting place where no one would ever discover you or learn of the delights of the stolen hours.

He sighed and shook his head. He himself cared little for art. Even the Callistan. He had seen the work of the Silvermen before without being impressed. Why should this picture so entrance him?

He sat at Borden's desk.

God!

Her eyes had turned to regard him and then turned away just as he looked at her. A disturbing sensation tickled his nostrils. The heavy wood and free oxygen smell of an open field.

Suddenly a glow went through his body. He knew the truth now. They were going to meet. They were going to meet in a secret place in the woods where the late afternoon sun made the forest mahogany rich, where leaves whispered in a seductive wind, where the warm earth smelled

of surging life . . . a kiss was wet with promise.

"Dr. Wales!"

He swung around to face Mrs. Borden. Whatever else, she wasn't nor ever had been the clear-skinned, frank-eyed beauty of the picture. She was an ugly lump in the room.

"You have a call from your office," she said.

"Thank you. Must've—uh—dozed off. Been working too hard."

Mrs. Borden smiled a superior smile and linked him with the picture in a cynical look. Wales felt himself blush, picked up his bag, dropped it, recovered it, and made a ridiculous exit.

Mr. Borden died the next day. Dr. Wales shook his head as he put his now-useless instruments back into his case. All but one.

"After all, he was seventy," Wales told Mrs. Borden. "And he worked around atomic energy for too many years."

A tear shimmered in her eye. "I know, Doctor. You did all that you possibly could . . . By the way, that picture in the study. The one with the girl."

Wales felt his heart stop for a moment. But he kept his voice careful.

"Yes?"

"I would prefer to give it to you—have it out of the house."

"Well—"

"I have had it wrapped. Please take it—"

He forced down the keen excitement, the illogical delight that he should cherish a mere picture. "Well, if it makes you feel better."

"It will," she said. "And now I'm going to get some rest, if you don't mind. I haven't slept much since he—"

"Certainly."

He felt a bit sorry for her as she went. He looked at her ordinary figure, the plain face with the mole and the light hairs on the upper lip. The dry, cracked lips. The human animal of her. A woman, just another woman, filling her clothes, filling her place in this house, in her society . . .

Something was over and done in this room. The still figure on the bed, the furniture, the bric-a-brac, the home-like rug, neither too worn, nor too new. The Borden, a tiny planet of a family going along from payday to vacation. And the book is closed by death and the world never knows.

He shook his head to break the spell. The picture, by all

means, the picture. It was easy to understand why the woman hated it. A living, breathing rival—that any woman could understand and react against. But Borden's picture—that sort of a woman—what could you do?

There! The door was safely closed. He was alone with the dead man. Dr. Wales picked up the delicate electronic probe. He plugged in the transistorized translator, fed current to the probe and to the device coming out of the translator, which terminated in ear plugs on his own head. This receiver looked like nothing so much as an old-fashioned doctor's stethoscope.

It was against the law and against medical ethics to probe a dead mind unless there was evidence of a crime. But he had to know about the woman in the woods, the woman in the picture.

He began sifting Borden's memories. His hands trembled as he dug guiltily into the mind that had stopped living, applying a delicate electromagnetic current where there had been a delicate chemico-organic current of life shortly before. The magnificent structure of the mind was still properly organized for this, like a room is warm even when the tenants have left.

Nor would there be any effect on Borden—it would not revive him, just as another person's entering a vacated room would have no effect on the person who had just left.

Back . . . back . . . Borden aged fifty . . . Borden aged forty . . . Borden aged thirty. But the picture still existed; its origin was further back. Wales knew Borden had been married before. Could it have been of the first wife? No, there was her face. Pleasant but a far cry from the girl in the picture. A lively, talkative woman. No wonder the second Mrs. Borden was silent and withdrawn. Borden's first wife had talked his arm off!

Borden at twenty . . . Ahh, that was before the picture. Wales steadied his tiring arm, taut with the management of the delicate probe, moving so gently over the dead man's skull.

"Let's do it by birthdays!" he told himself. "Twenty-first, twenty-second—"

He found the origin of the picture slightly after Borden's twenty-sixth birthday.

CALLISTO! "LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THIS IS YOUR TOURWARDEN.

"We will be on Callisto, fourth moon of Jupiter for three days. You will see many

wonders on Callisto . . . You'll see the famous Rock Gardens of Jupiter wherein the changing crystalline structures make the stone formations grow and age before your eyes . . . You'll see the glaciers of metal, in ceaseless, pouring formation due to Jupiter's immense gravity . . . and take the Metal River tour for only fifty dollars into the wondrous flat-lands of Callisto. You'll see the universe-renowned Astro-Callisto, the greatest man-made astronomy center in the universe, where, by the aid of polished mirrors, you can study the City of New York, Earth in detail, from 390,000,000 miles away!

"And don't forget the Callistan bazaar where you will meet and mingle with life-forms from the outer planets, the alvecchi, and the silveri—that great race of artists who will paint you an unforgettable picture for a very few dollars."

The silveri . . .

Wales steadied the probe again . . .

THE BAZAAR . . .

The artificial light of the oxygen dome glinted down on the scene. Around Borden were a maze of tiny booths and stalls where the creatures of Jupiter, Saturn, and Nep-

tune displayed the wares for the people of Earth, Venus and Mercury. A heavyweight Jupiterian slug smelled and stank in a tank nearby, yet wasn't offensive to the young earthman's excited senses. The mechanic-genius of the alvecchi exhibited the wonderful devices called by Earthmen "flying carpets," manufactured near Saturn, worth five thousand dollars on Earth. Here you could buy the finest for a mere five hundred.

Young Borden drank in the pure, sweet oxygen from the dome atmosphere; his eyes sparkled. This was it, a far-away place of dreams, a week of his life he would never forget.

A twisted, silver-glinting face smiled up at young Borden. A silveri! "Peecture, young man," he said with furtive looks about him. "Peecture?"

"What have you got?" asked Borden.

The silverman shrugged, if it could be called that. "What you like?" He tugged Borden to a stool near his easel with child-like tentacles.

Borden sat grinning. "How about a picture of me?" he said.

"No, peecture of self no good." The silverman in his

eagerness for Earth dollars patted Borden's knee and hastened a monster-sized canvas onto his easel. He fitted a dozen paint spray tips to a dozen tiny spray guns.

He was talkative.

"On Earth they have the great tradition," he said. "Pretty woman. Woman such as do not exist in real life. This I read from your mind. This is what you wish for."

"Oh," smiled Borden.

"Watch. You see what I shall do for you. It is Earthmen that dream of this perfect creature. She is different for each man. She is one part his mother. She is one part a girl from the high school senior year. She is one part a movie poster. She is one part the seductive, secret wonder face from a crowd, just a flash he has seen—"

Young Borden grinned nervously, thinking of his mother and all the girls he had ever liked.

The silverman closed his eyes and weaved back and forth in front of Borden as if enchanting himself. His dozen child-like tentacles made delicate, air-carving motions in front of Borden's face.

"See? I dip into your mind . . . to find the Mother-face and the puppy-love face, and the face of the ultimate ad.

Oh, you shall have a fine woman!"

Borden blushed and laughed self-consciously. He felt like he was buying pornography.

But the silverman fell silent. Suddenly he began to paint. And Borden felt his hair creep up at the sight that appeared on the canvas. The man's dozen tentacles worked very fast blocking in a dark bedroom scene. And a woman began to appear . . .

Borden felt a tingle in his stomach that ran up to the base of his skull. He looked around in awe at the silver-metal gleaming bazaar and its strangeness and then at the picture that was more like home itself—more like a woman than any woman ever had been or ever could be.

Straight out of his subconscious, each line and feature perfect. The wonderful dream girl who was beautiful, more beautiful for being his and his alone.

It was too painful to watch. Borden jumped up and walked off to stare down at the Jupiterian slug, his temples pounding.

And presently he felt a rustle as the silverman slipped the finished picture under his arm.

Borden felt his slim travel-

er's wallet with misgivings. For such a picture he would have to pay much—yet must pay, must have it.

"How—how much?" he asked.

"A dollar, Earth," said the silverman.

Shocked, Borden paid the pittance. "Only a dollar?"

Then he saw the mocking look in the silverman's eyes. "Only a dollar for the peecture. It is only worth a dollar. No Earth-man painter could do you such a peecture, not having the mind-reach inside of you. But it is only worth a dollar. Is that a riddle?"

The silverman chuckled, shook his head and pocketed his dollar. Then he moved off, bowing and scraping, to accost two rotund, umbrella-carrying ladies from Des Moines.

The silverman tugged at the flowered sleeve of one of them, "Peecture, missy? Peecture? . . ."

Borden kept the picture hidden, but alone in his stateroom he stared at it for hours. It was . . . satisfying. He had a great horror that it would be stolen from him. It was irreplaceable.

Then one day a steward came into his cabin before he could cover the picture. Bor-

den watched the other Earthman's face as he studied the picture, incongruous on the impersonal metal wall, with its warm flesh tones and twentieth century bedroom decor.

"Hope you didn't pay too much for that," grinned the steward. "The silver are funny. They've got a great sense of humor. Make you think they can really dig into your mind and all."

There was a little imperfection in front of the girl. The steward touched it with his hand. "You gotta watch 'em. The oils they use change. Sometimes when you get home the picture is all different. Sometimes it doesn't change for years afterwards."

"I thought it rather good," said Borden, feigning indifference.

The steward wrinkled his nose. "A pretty ordinary looking woman," he said.

Then Borden understood. The silverman *had* gone into his mind. The picture represented an ideal. But only his own—no other man's. No one would steal the picture from him.

No one ever did. She remained his ideal through two marriages. Both wives instinctively disliked the picture, but it was harmless,

really, just a man's ideal, thrust on him in his growing years by a society that found great use for an idea of woman above women themselves.

Wales shut off the death probe and sighed. It was evident that his ideal had been close to Borden's. Thus the attraction for him that the picture held.

He put away the probe and silently saluted the still figure of the old man on the bed.

Wales took the picture along, waiting until after supper to hang it in his own study.

He set it on his desk. He made a place for it on the wall. He unwrapped it with a thumping heart. He could hear his wife in the next room, busy with her evening sewing.

That blur on the picture. It was flaking a little, and suddenly Wales got excited. There was something under the blur, another figure, and the blotch had been loosened by the tight wrappings.

It was evident that the silverman had meant the blotch to be cleared away, for the patch that covered the figure was totally oxidized, dry paint, easy to rub off with a typewriter eraser brush that

Wales found handily in his desk. He worked carefully, filled with joyous anticipation. Another girl—

Wales gave a sharp cry of disappointment.

Under the patch was a man, young Borden. Borden as he had looked that day in the bazaar on Callisto. The vacation-wonder of the day shone in his eyes, and he towered in youth and strength, more like Borden than Borden himself . . . an ideal Borden.

All of Borden's wonder was directed at the girl in the picture. And now her puzzling look was solved. She returned the wonder, the ideal girl with her ideal mate. It *was* a bedroom, not a secret place in the woods, and the girl was no longer aware of the outside world that Wales occupied.

The picture was dead for Wales.

It would've been dead for Borden years ago. Seeing himself as idealized he would have felt the sharp discrepancy between the ideal and the real Borden. And would have finally and at last understood the sharp demarcation between this ideal woman and the necessary reality of womanhood.

But Borden had been too smart to spoil his ideal by

looking too closely, by shredding the picture of its final mystery.

Wales got out of the study fast.

Winifred looked up from her knitting.

"John—"

He could tell by her soft tone of voice that she was going to ask for something that would cost too much. He armed himself with suspicion.

"Yes?"

"Maude and Doctor Trumbull are going on a long vacation this summer. To the moons of Jupiter, on a tour. I know you hate to travel, but we never go anywhere."

Dr. Wales sat down abruptly. His hands began to tremble again. Already he could see the mocking, gentle eyes of the silverman, probing in his mind for the girl. This time she wouldn't escape—he wouldn't pursue her so hard. She was in his mind as she had been in Borden's, and she would be on canvas as Borden's was, and this time, like Borden, he would not try to shred the ideal of its necessary far-offness and mystery . . .

He patted Mrs. Wales' shoulder. "We might go to the moons of Jupiter at that, Winifred."

THE END

Baseball seldom figures to make a bitter-sweet story. But here's a wild tale that mixes mental power with Mickey Mantle-ism, and leaves you glad that you met

THE MIDDLE-AGED ROOKIE

By CHARLES D. HAMMER

HE WAS a tired-looking, rumped little man, about forty-five or so. And, though it had been thirty years since Dave Marks had first attended a ballgame at the immense stadium of the New York Yankees, this was the first time his feet had ever touched the turf on which the ballplayers trod.

It was a warm spring morning, and the air was fresh and clean. Marks, standing near the dugout staring up at the empty expanses of seats in the distant stands, wondered what it must feel like to park one back there.

He heard the sharp *crack!* of bat against ball, and glanced around suddenly to see a tanned youngster grinning broadly at the plate, and a white pellet vanishing into

the unoccupied left-field bleachers.

"Good shot, kid!" shouted a raucous voice. "Let's see another out there now!"

Marks watched as the man on the mound sent a slow floater spinning up to the plate. The youngster smiled confidently, tightened his grip on his bat, and lined the ball out to short. The boy in the field seemed to leap ten feet in the air to pull the drive in.

Suddenly Marks felt a rough hand tap him on the back. He turned and saw a tall, slab-jawed man in a baseball uniform looking down at him.

"Sorry, Pop. It doesn't matter if your son's trying out for the team or not—you can't stay on the ballfield. It's a matter of safety."

Marks shook his head. "I don't have a son," he said. "I'm a bachelor."

The other wrinkled his brows. "Okay, your nephew, then. Look, mister, these kids are trying out for a big-league team, and we just can't have excess spectators on the field. Now, if you'd like to watch from the dugout—"

"You don't understand," Marks said. "I'm not here to watch." He drew himself up proudly, and delivered the words he'd been waiting so long to say. "I'm here to try out for the New York Yankees!"

The man in the baseball uniform stood there, gaping, for a long moment, surveying Marks' dumpy figure and balding head. His mouth moved slowly open and shut for a while, and then he managed to say, "Did I hear you right?"

"I said I'm here to try out for the team." He fished in his jacket pocket, drew forth the tattered clipping from the sports pages. "Here's the item, right here—it says that the Yankees will hold tryouts at the Stadium at 10 A.M. May 18, and that all local talent interested in a possible Yankees contract should report then."

The other nodded slowly.

"That's right. We *are* looking for new ballplayers, and the tryout system's a good way to find them. Why don't you go home and send your nephew, Pop?"

"Listen," Marks said patiently. "The clipping says nothing about age. I think I can play big-league ball, and you've got to give me at least a tryout. Are you the manager?"

"Uh-uh. I'm only the first-base coach. And I'm glad of it, too. With all the oddball things that go on here, I wouldn't want his job. How old do you claim to be?"

"Forty-seven," Dave said.

"Forty-seven," the coach repeated incredulously. "And you want to play for the Yankees. Okay, Satchel Paige—come on over to the manager, and we'll see if he's crazy enough to let you show your stuff."

It had actually started thirty years before, on a hot September afternoon in 1927. Dave Marks had been in the Stadium stands that day, a chubby, unathletic boy in his middle teens. The Senators were in town to take on the fearsome, pennant-bound Yankees, and it was a day to remember.

Dave recalled it clearly—

how the Washington pitcher had stared down at the hulking figure at the plate, had chewed reflectively on his lump of tobacco, and had gone into his windup. The man at the plate had swung, with the astounding grace that seemed so improbable in such an awkward figure, and the ball had traveled on a clean, high arc into the far-off stands.

The crowd had exploded in wild approval, and baseball history had been made. Marks remembered how tears of happiness had rolled down his cheeks as the immortal Bambino trotted around the bases, moving with his clumsy, peculiar, mincing gait, and trod the plate for his sixtieth circuit blow of the season.

Sixty home runs! A matchless record, one of the milestones of athletic achievement. It was a stunning accomplishment, a record to stand for the ages.

And young Dave Marks, who had never swung a baseball bat in his life, listened to the ecstatic screaming of the crowd and vowed that the first man to hit sixty-one homers was going to be—Dave Marks.

It seemed unlikely. Dave's athletic experience had been strictly vicarious up till then. A mild, unassuming person

even as a child, Dave had never dared to join the other boys in their games, and had always remained withdrawn and shy. He made up for this by becoming an avid follower of the Yankees, that majestic team that so dominated the league.

By identifying himself with the exploits of the all-powerful Bronx ballclub, Dave was able to maintain his own self-respect. Each year, as the Yankees rolled remorselessly on to their inevitable pennant, Dave regarded it as a sort of personal achievement of his own. Each home run, each brilliant play, each tight-pitched game added privately to his own stature.

And then the moment of the Babe's sixtieth home run, and Dave reached a new and disturbing realization. His happiness, he now saw, was an empty sham; the Yankees might be a great ball team, but Dave Marks himself was a totally worthless and insignificant person. That final home-run blast peeled the scales away, showed him that he himself had done nothing in life and probably would never do anything.

That was when he made his vow. He *would* do something; he would leave his mark. He

would become a major-league ballplayer, and he would break the Babe's seemingly immortal record.

It took some doing. That day he had gone home inflamed with his new ambition, and the next afternoon he had taken part in his first baseball game. It was an experience he would long remember.

They put him in right field, where he couldn't do much damage defensively, and luckily no balls came out there in the first few innings. In the second, Dave came to bat.

It was an inauspicious start for a would-be Babe Ruth. He grasped the bat at the wrong end and uncertainly took his position standing on the plate.

"Whatinell you think you're doin'?" the catcher demanded.

Dave looked at him in embarrassment and finally had confessed that he did not know how to bat. After a short pause for astonishment, the catcher put him in the batter's box and told him which end of the bat to swing.

The first pitch came down, at blinding speed. Dave swung. Dave missed. The second likewise, and the third. That concluded Dave's active baseball career.

He realized he would have to fulfill his vow at some later

date. He set his dreams aside for a while, and concentrated on the more serious business of getting a commercial degree and finding a good, secure job as a bookkeeper—the sort of job that would allow him leisure for reflection and planning.

Dave studied handbooks and took courses at gyms, but after a short while it became obvious that he did not have the physical equipment to produce a squib single, let alone a four-master. He seemed doomed to a life as a nonentity—one of the shadowy little men who skirt the edges of existence and are rapidly forgotten.

During the Thirties, he watched anxiously as first one, then another athlete approached the magic number of sixty, without getting there. Hack Wilson pounded out 56, one year; Jimmy Foxx and Mel Ott cleared fifty. Hank Greenberg gave the recordbook a terrific struggle before stopping short at 58.

In 1947—the year Ralph Kiner and Johnny Mize hit 51 homers each—Dave Marks struck his method. Twenty years had passed, but he had not given up. And now he had it.

He took up the studies of oriental philosophy, learned

of the workings of yoga and of Hindu mysticism. He practiced strange, ascetic disciplines in the privacy of his rented room in the Bronx, in the shadow of the great stadium. He drew near his goal.

Five years passed, as he painstakingly acquired mental strength to compensate for his lack of physical power. He concentrated his faculties on the attainment of one goal—the ability to hit sixty-one home runs in big-league competition. It was more than a vow, by now; it was an obsession.

And one day, five years later, he felt a sudden surge of power run shiveringly through him, as if he had attached himself to a transformer that poured tremendous voltage into him. The power was his, now. He was graying, spreading around the middle, and as unimpressive as always.

But now he was sure. It was in his grasp.

When the notice came for tryout time, he reported to the ballpark.

Yankee Manager Lew Yancey was a small, wizened man with a squint in one of his faded blue eyes. He stared unbelievably at Marks, then to the coach, who shrugged.

"He says he's here to try out, Lew."

"Mumph. What kind of joke is this?"

"I think I can help your team," Marks said firmly, surprising even himself. "I demand to be tried out."

The manager squinted his eye up until it was hidden almost completely by the folds of skin. "Tryout, eh? Don't recognize you. You been around?"

"No, sir. I've never played in Organized Baseball."

"Not at all? What kind of experience do you have, then?"

"None," Dave said blandly. "I've never played a game of baseball in my life."

The manager froze, speechless. He took off his cap and stared at it uneasily, groping for words. Finally he said, "One of us is crazy, friend. And I'm not at all sure which one. Maybe both."

"Look," Dave said in annoyance. "I'm merely asking for a tryout. I don't think you are being fair. For all you know, I might be the greatest power hitter the game has ever seen."

Yancey let his cap drop to the ground. He stared at it for a moment, unable to speak. The coach stepped up and said, "Look, mister, why don't

you take the subway down to Brooklyn? We'll even pay your fare. They thrive on screwballs down there. We prefer a more conservative kind of ball."

"No," Yancey said, recovering his voice. "Let's give him his tryout. Then we can get rid of him legally. We've wasted too much time on this crazy business as it is." He turned to Dave. "Okay, slugger. Get into your uniform and pick up a couple of bats."

Dave was taken aback. "Uniform? But I don't—"

"No uniform, eh? Not even spikes?"

Dave shook his head. He was genuinely angry with himself; how could he have forgotten such a simple thing?

The manager glared at him desperately. "Okay—go over there and borrow a pair of spikes from one of the kids. Get 'em on and go out there and bat."

"Yes, sir!" Dave said.

The boy was about seventeen, and he looked at Dave with awe. "You wanta borrow my spikes, mister?"

"That's right," Dave said. "I'd like to take some cuts—but I didn't bring any equipment along with me."

"Sure thing!" the boy said, bending down and undoing

his laces. "Gosh, here they are!" He held out the black leather shoes to Dave, who undid his own laces and slipped into the spikes.

"Thanks a lot," Dave said. "I'll give them back to you after I've batted."

"That's all right," he said. "It must be real nostalgic to come back to the scene of your former glories, isn't it? To take some swings like the old time?"

"It certainly is — huh? What do you mean?"

The boy grinned. "Why, you're Tony Lazzeri, aren't you? The old-time Yankee star? My Dad's got an autographed picture of you, and—"

Dave shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid you're mistaken, son. My name's Dave Marks."

"Dave Marks? Never heard of you. Who'd you play for?"

"No one, yet," said Dave. "But you just wait—just wait."

He picked up a bat and walked away, leaving the boy staring mystifiedly after him.

As he approached the plate, he heard a puzzled buzzing spreading around the field, as the boys trying out in the infield started to ask each other, "Who's that?" and the youngsters waiting their turns at bat did the same.

The manager cupped his hands and called to the boy then at bat. "Okay, fellow. You've had it for now. Let this other rookie take some swings."

Dave strode to the plate and planted himself firmly, swinging the bat back and forth. He had learned some of the fundamentals of the game in the thirty years since he'd last stood at the plate, and by now he was well aware which end of the bat he was supposed to swing.

"Okay, Charlie," Yancey shouted to the mound. "Big hitter up. Let's see you try the best stuff you got."

The pitcher, a tall, spider-armed youngster in a dirty gray semi-pro uniform, took the ball from the catcher and started nonchalantly into his windup. Dave waited confidently, focussing his mind sharply according to the method he had so painstakingly developed.

This was it, now. This was his first step toward the accomplishment of his lifelong ambition. It was now or never, and there would be no second chance.

The pitcher released the ball. Dave watched it as it came toward the plate. It was a fastball with plenty on it. But he accelerated his mental

processes, thereby slowing down the ball. He could almost count the stitches on it as it drifted to the plate—although he knew that, to all of the scoffing onlookers, it was steaming in there a mile a minute.

He waited till the ball reached the plate and started to rise, and brought the bat around slowly, timing his actions. At the moment when the golden-hued wood grazed the nearest red stitch, Dave extended his mind and *pushed*. Then he brought the bat around in the follow-through motion.

A long moment of silence followed, succeeded by an audible gasp from the dugout. Dave grinned proudly as the ball crashed into the left-field seats.

He looked around. They were all watching him aghast—the manager, the coach, the pitcher, who was looking at his right hand as if it had suddenly come to independent life. By all rights, the little man at the plate should have missed by a mile. But he hadn't. He'd put the ball in the seats.

"Give him another," the manager ordered in a choked half-whisper. "That must have been a fluke."

It wasn't. Dave, superbly confident now, slowed the ball mentally, *pushed*, and sent it rocketing far out into center-field. He bashed the next one up against the right-field scoreboard. The next vanished into the upper deck in left.

His arms were getting tired from the unaccustomed exertion. He dropped the bat, mopped the sweat from his forehead, and glanced around at the gawking group.

"Satisfied?" he asked.

The manager looked at him blearily. "Tell me something, mister—are you real?"

Dave ignored the question. "Think you can use me?"

The manager passed a hand across his eyes. "I'd love to—but I don't believe in you. Leprechauns; yet!"

"Want me to hit some more?"

"No," he said hurriedly. "Not just now. I want the owner to see you in action this afternoon. And if *he* believes you're really there—brother, welcome to the New York Yankees!"

The papers announced the news the next day. The *Daily Telegraph* gave it a little squib, tacked on at the bottom of an account of the previous night's Yankee-Red Sox encounter. It said, simply:

Yankees Sign Free Agent

Manager Lew Yancey announced just before last night's game that a free agent has joined the club in the capacity of utility outfielder. He's rookie Dave Marks, who signed for what is believed to be the minimum salary of \$6000. He has no previous professional record.

Yancey declined to comment on Marks' immediate value to the club. We suspect it's another of Yancey's "sleeper" plays, and if it pays off as well as the others have, it will mean (ho-hum) another Series victory for the Yankees.

The game that night was the second in the set with the Red Sox, who were currently holding down first place. The Yankees, last year's World Champs, were in third, a dismal seven games off the pace—not a very good showing at all.

It was a cool May evening, and Dave Marks took his place at the end of the bench with a mind-swirling feeling that none of this was really happening. The other players, who knew of the new addition to the club but who had not yet seen him, goggled in astonishment as the tubby, middle-aged rookie, clad in a hastily-located uniform two

sizes too big, entered the dug-out.

It was hard to believe. He, Dave Marks, was finally sitting on the bench of the New York Yankees, looking out at the carefully-manicured grass of the outfield, waiting for the start of his first big-league game.

After the playing of the National Anthem, the Public Address Announcer reeled off the starting lineup—and a startled murmur rippled through the stands as the loudspeakers boomed out the words, "Batting third and playing right field, Number Eighty-seven, Dave Marks."

Dave could almost hear them all asking each other, "*Who's he?*" And on the bench, the reaction was the same. The players were staring oddly at him, obviously wondering how this fattish, fortyish newcomer had muscled into their lineup. Batting third, of all things! And starting in right!

The players took the field. Dave jogged slowly out to his position, not over-exerting himself. He wasn't used to running, and it was a long way out to right. He stationed himself in what looked like the proper position, and started to loosen up the stiff, shiny new glove Manager Yancey

had provided for him that afternoon.

From the distant plate, over two hundred feet away, Dave heard the umpire yell, "Play Ball!" The first batter stepped to the plate.

Dave heard the center-fielder calling to him. "Hey, Marks!"

"What is it?"

"This guy's a pull hitter. Get over by the line, and I'll back you up on anything that comes by."

Dave stared in toward the plate, watching the batter. As he dreaded, the leadoff was a lefty. That meant there was a good possibility of a ball being hit to right field, and Dave knew he didn't stand a chance of fielding it. He was in this lineup solely to hit.

Yancey had stationed him in right earlier that day, and had batted fungoes to him. After Dave muffed ten or eleven badly, the manager had called him in.

"I see you're no fielder," Yancey said.

Dave nodded. "Guess not, sir."

"Hmm. That may cause trouble. But it should be all right if you can bat in more runs with your stick than you allow in with your lousy fielding."

That was Dave's hope. And he lived up to expectations on the first batted ball.

It was a high, floating pop-up behind first base. The first-sacker backpedalled, but he saw he couldn't get to it and signalled to Dave to come in and take it. It was a ridiculously easy chance.

Heart pounding, Dave moved in at the slow crawl that was his top speed, and extended his glove. The ball dropped a good five feet in front of him. He knocked the ball down; then, bending with difficulty, he picked up the rolling pellet, dropped it, picked it up again, and flipped it, underhand, over the first baseman's head. It trickled on toward the mound, and the runner wound up on second.

"Just jitters," the center-fielder yelled encouragingly. "You'll loosen up, Pop. Just stay with it."

The next batter raised a long fly to deep left, but the man out there loped gracefully back and collared it. The runner did not advance.

The third man at bat was—horribly—another lefty. This time, Dave saw the center-fielder edging over a little to back him up, and he felt silently thankful.

The batter fouled the first

pitch off, took the second for a ball, and lashed the next one straight at Dave. He didn't have to move a step. It came straight at him, almost aiming at his glove—and ripped right on through his straining fingers.

The ball rolled on to the wall, and by the time the center-fielder could retrieve one run was over and the batter was perched on third. The crowd was openly booing, now; Dave had messed up his first two big-league plays, and no one could understand what he was doing in the lineup at all.

Dave faced the infield grimly. If he could only get out of this horrid inning, he'd show them what he was doing here! But suppose everyone kept hitting to right? He couldn't field at all—and the first inning might go on and on. He had a fleeting, nightmarish image of a twenty-run first inning, with Red Sox capering happily around the bases all evening while line drives ricocheted off the right-field wall.

The fourth batter up was a powerful righty. But he, too, had apparently discovered the defensive weakness in the outfield. As the first pitch came in, he shifted his feet and lofted a high fly out in Dave's direction.

Oh, Lord, here comes another error, he thought dismally, as the ball soared toward him. But, mercifully, just as he began to wander in dizzy circles under it, he saw the figure of the center-fielder come dashing in front of him, barely manage to grab the ball, and keep on running full tilt ahead up against the foul-line box seats.

The runner scored easily after the catch. Two runs were in, now—both unearned, and both at the expense of Dave's sorry fielding.

The Yankee pitcher managed to strike out the fifth batter, and they were out of the inning at last. It had seemed endless, and Dave was amazed to discover, as he looked up at the scoreboard clock, that only thirteen minutes had elapsed. For him it was more like thirty hours.

Kennedy, the shortstop, led off for the Yanks and singled sharply to left. Donaho, the fleet-footed center-fielder, then dropped a neat bunt and beat it out. That put men on first and second quickly, with no one away. The tying runs were on, as Dave stepped to the plate.

A lusty round of boos came down from the bleachers. They were on him but good

for his fielding lapses in the first half of the inning.

"Go home, busher!" a leather-lunged voice called.

Dave stared resentfully at the stands and dug his spikes in. He turned and stared at Manager Yancey, who was watching him anxiously with gleaming, beady eyes from the third-base line. The manager was shaking his head, as if he was still unable to believe he had actually signed Dave.

This was the moment, now. His first major-league at-bat, at the age of forty-seven!

The man on the mound was Lefty Ruddell, a twenty-game winner of the year before and the Red Sox mound ace. He looked down in bewilderment at the dumpy figure standing at the plate, and, shaking his head, took the sign from the catcher.

Dave grinned. He was going to make this good.

The first pitch was a blinding fastball, and he made no attempt to hit it. It roared over the plate, and the umpire flung up his right hand. "*Strike One!*"

The crowd started to murmur again. They didn't understand what was going on, but they didn't like it.

He took a swing at the second pitch—again, without exerting his power. Naturally,

he missed the jug-handle curve by several feet. Down at third, Yancey was stirring around uneasily, wondering if he'd made a terrible mistake by taking Dave on.

Okay, Dave thought. *Now we show them*. He stepped back in, and, imitating a gesture he'd first seen in 1932, he pointed cavalierly toward the left-field stands.

There was a universal gasp. This sort of bravado was too much! Ruddell got off the mound as if he couldn't believe his eyes, and then, smiling sardonically, took his position, determined to show the bushier up.

As he took his windup, Dave liberated his mind according to the method he had developed, and waited. Beads of sweat sprang out along his brow from the effort. The pitch came down. Feeling a warm glow of confidence, Dave slowed, *pushed*, and parked the ball in the second deck.

There were sixty thousand people in the ballpark. Not one of them was able to use his voice for a full minute.

The papers the next morning all reflected the same attitude: *I don't believe it*. The *Telegraph* headline read, *Middle-Aged Rookie Bots In Nine, Kicks*

Over Seven. Underneath that, the subhead said, Unheralded Dove Marks Belts Three Homers, Makes Four Errors.

The story said:

Miracle Man Lew Yancey has done it again. He won the pennant with mirrors last year, and he's obviously bent on doing it by black magic this season. His latest wonder worker is an unimpressive little fellow named Dave Marks, who came out of nowhere to trounce the Red Sox singlehanded last night.

Marks, unknown to Organized Baseball before last night, ran an amusing race with himself. Just about the worst fielder the majors have ever seen, he kicked in seven unearned runs with his feeble fielding. But he more than atoned with an astonishing display of power hitting.

The unheralded slugger uncorked a three-run blast in the first, smashed over two more in the third with homer number two. He fanned on three pitches in the fifth, and his bizarre fielding the next inning helped to push over five Boston runs.

In the last of the seventh, though, Marks knocked in four with a grand slammer to complete the one-man rout. Manager Yancey refused to comment on—

Dave put the paper down and stretched contentedly. Every muscle in his body hurt, just from the effort of swinging his bat and running around the bases, but he did not mind.

Chalked on the wall of his one-room apartment were three long, proud red marks. He had measured the wall. There was room for exactly fifty-eight more stripes.

He looked at his watch: ten past eight. Normally, by this time, he'd be dressed and heading for the subway. But not any more. Two days earlier, the day he'd signed with the Yankees, he'd called his office.

They had certainly been astonished when he announced he was quitting. Johnson, Marks' boss, had blustered and expostulated, knowing that meek, mild Dave Marks was easily beaten down.

"You can't quit now, Marks!" he had spluttered. "You've left your books half written up, and—"

"Never mind, Johnson," Dave had said coolly, fondling the Yankee contract in his pocket. "I'm quitting, and I mean it." He savored the words.

Johnson had been nonplussed. Dave grinned, and wondered how his ex-boss had

reacted to this morning's sports pages.

He reported to the ballpark at noon, as instructed, and the players who were there eyed him with new respect.

"That was some night you had last night, Marks," said Donaho, the center-fielder. He was a swift-footed, smooth-faced kid half Marks' age, and he looked at Dave with an expression compounded of awe and bewilderment.

"Don't mention it, kid. Just stay behind me on those line drives. I'm not much of a fielder, you know."

"Who cares?" Donaho asked. "Three homers a night and we don't even *need* a right-fielder!"

Dave suited up and moved out onto the field, where batting-practice was getting under way. The squat figure of Manager Yancey was visible, batting flies to the pitchers in the outfield.

As soon as he saw Marks, he turned. "Great going last night, young feller!" he said. "I meant to congratulate you on your debut, but you flew out so fast I couldn't find you."

"It was past eleven, sir," Dave said. "I like to get to bed early."

"Oh," Yancey said. He

shrugged his shoulders. It was evident he didn't care what sort of idiosyncrasies his new right-fielder had, so long as he kept up the slugging.

"You mind if I skip batting-practice, sir?" Dave asked. "I'd like to save my energy for the game. I'm not a young man, you know."

Yancey considered the matter for a moment. "Okay," he said. "It's irregular, but in view of the circumstances I'll excuse you."

Dave grinned. He had this ballclub eating out of his hand.

He deliberately restrained himself to one homer that day, since the Yanks opened such a commanding lead in the early innings that the issue was never in doubt. He belted it in the third, with two aboard, and allowed himself two pop-ups and a strikeout in his other three at-bats.

He didn't want to make it too obvious. After all, there were more than a hundred games left on the schedule, and if he played in every one it was perfectly possible for him to hit four or five hundred home runs, since the system of mental control seemed to work infallibly. He didn't want to do that. He loved and respected baseball, and he did

not want to turn things into a farce by misuse of his special power.

That afternoon, after the game, he returned home early and made out a schedule showing how he intended to set the home-run record. He had it all planned carefully, and allowed for a couple of days off each week to spend on fishing trips. He didn't doubt that Yancey would allow him to take them; he could always plead that his advanced age didn't allow him to play a full schedule.

Dave worked it out carefully, with the same methodicalness that had characterized his entire life. He allotted the home runs to specific big games, planned the number he'd hit in each game—allowing for a maximum of four, one day late in the season. He would repeat his triple-homer feat three more times, and pull a double eleven times. The remaining homers would be hit one at a time, interspersed with enough strikeouts and pop-ups to hold his average down to a respectable .375 or so. He didn't want to hit any grounders; a man his age had no business running around the bases. It was all he could do to run out his home runs.

When he was through with

the detailed schedule, he leaned back and surveyed his handiwork. He smiled blissfully. It wasn't dishonest, he thought, to hit home runs this way. Other men have the advantage of superior strength; he had the supreme advantage of superior mental ability. It had taken forty-seven years, but at long last he was about to justify his existence.

From the *Daily Telegraph*,
July 22:

The New York Yankees swept into first place today on the strength of the mighty bat of Dave Marks. The astonishing slugger made a triumphant return to the lineup today after missing four games, and made his presence felt with his 24th and 25th homers of the campaign. The twin blows put him only three circuit shots behind Roy Cartwright of Detroit for the league lead—and Cartwright had twelve the day Marks made his sensational debut!

July 29:

Dave Marks' potent wand had them buzzing down in Baltimore today. He became the first man in history to hit three homers in one game in cavernous Municipal Stadium, while leading the front-running Yankees to an easy 12-3 victory over

the Orioles. Marks' three-some gave him a neat 31 for the season. Could it be that this unimpressive little man is slated to crack the record that has withstood assault so long?

August 13:

The Yankees made it nine straight today, and moved a cozy eleven games ahead of the pack. Miracle Man Marks continued in his slump, though. He went 0-for-5, and hasn't hit a homer in a week. Has he run out of steam at last?

August 28:

Lou Gehrig, Gil Hodges, Joe Adcock, and the other members of the exclusive Four Homers club had to move over today, when little Dave Marks joined their number. The Miracle Man parked four gigantic blasts in deepest center to write his name indelibly on the records, thus breaking out of his mysterious slump with a bang.

With the season just about over as far as the pennant race is concerned, the only point of interest in the remaining month is whether Marks is going to reach the coveted goal of sixty-one homers. He's got forty-two now. Can he do it?

September 6:

The Yankees clinched an-

other pennant today. No surprise, certainly; they're now a fat eighteen games ahead, with seventeen to go. All eyes are on Dave Marks now.

September 12:

Wonder Man Marks, who socked his fifty-fifth homer today, may be in for trouble. A delegation of players and managers presented a petition to the Commissioner of Baseball today to hold a private examination of the sensational athlete, who seems destined to break Babe Ruth's all-time home run record.

"This has gone far enough," said one manager who refused to give his name. "It's obviously a hoax. The Commissioner ought to investigate. In fact, Congress ought to look into it!"

Should the Commissioner discover any evidence against Marks, there will be serious repercussions and the Yankees might stand to forfeit their already-clinched pennant. Manager Yancey must be squirming!

September 13:

A puzzled commissioner watched Dave Marks belt ten pitches into the Stadium stands today, in the company of all eight of the league's managers, three umpires, and three news-

men, including your reporter. After the demonstration the baseball czar turned away frowning, saying, "I don't know how he does it—but he's doing it!" He ruled that Marks was a legitimate player and disallowed the protest against his eligibility.

September 15:

To no one's surprise, Dave Marks smashed his 59th and 60th home runs today against the hapless Orioles, thereby tying the all-time mark. He's got eight games left to write his ticket to the Hall of Fame. Anyone want to take odds?

Dave Marks surveyed the long row of chalked stripes on his wall. He counted them carefully, as he did every morning, *Fifty-eight, fifty-nine, sixty.*

Sixty. He'd done it. The vivid picture clung in his mind of that *other* sixtieth homer, so long ago. They had cheered just as loud for him—though there had been a touch of sadness that baseball's fondest record should be equalled.

Today was the day. Today was the record-smasher.

The limousine called for him at eleven-thirty to take him to the ballpark, and somehow his guards got him in

past the throng of admirers already on hand waiting for the gates to open. A capacity house was expected for the possible record-breaker.

He noticed they were keeping their distance in the locker-room. The other players knew they were in the presence of a titan of the diamond, and they were awed. Calmly, with inward assurance, he got into his suit and stepped out on the playing-field. The stands were half full already, and when the crowd spotted the familiar pot-bellied figure they roared wildly.

The Red Sox had nominated Lefty Ruddell to absorb the punishment. It was only fitting; Ruddell had been the victim of Dave's first home run, and he was taking the mound to deliver the record-breaker.

Crackling tension hung over the ballpark as the first half of the first inning went into the books without a score. There was only one smash to right, which Donaho moved over to take. Dave had long since given up any pretense at being able to field; he was out there to hit, and only to hit.

The gigantic crowd waited impatiently as the first two batters came up and departed. No one noticed them; every-

one was waiting for Number Three in the lineup.

Ruddell, out on the mound, grew sadfaced and resigned as he saw Dave waddle to the plate. With an air of nonchalance Dave flung away the weighted bat, and took his position.

Ruddell stared down as if to say, *Why me?* Then he wound up and threw.

This is it, Dave thought. Following what was by now an ingrained routine, he extended his mind, slowed, *pushed*, and sent the ball high out of sight, far over the center-field wall. It was a monster home run—a fitting record-smasher.

The stands gave him an ear-splitting ovation.

As he watched the ball fade from view, his eyes suddenly went moist with emotion. That was it—Number Sixty-One. He was a national figure; he was Dave Marks, Home Run King. He dropped his bat and headed for first.

His feet were leaden; he could barely move. It was all he could do to get around the bases. Rounding third, he stumbled and very nearly collapsed, but somehow he got up and staggered home. He was very, very tired.

Dave hardly noticed what happened next. All he knew

was that he had done it at last, and all around him people were making a fuss. Making a fuss about *him*!

He came up again in the third, and the stands were pleading for another.

It would be sheer anticlimax, of course, the trimming on the cake. But Dave, in that moment, resolved on going out in a blaze of glory. He would hit *five* homers today, be the only man in baseball history to do so. He'd—

The first pitch came thundering in. He let it go by. Then the second, and likewise Dave did not venture. Ruddell swung into his windup and let loose the third serve.

Dave started to slow it down—and before he knew what was happening, the ball had shot past him. He was out! He hadn't hit it!

He returned to the bench. Obviously he was relaxing too much. He set his jaw and determined that he'd recover control of himself.

It came in the eighth. He grinned pluckily at the crowd, and dug his spikes in hard. Letting the first two pitches go by, he concentrated fiercely on the third.

It was a slow curve, but he couldn't make it any slower. And when he *pushed*, nothing happened. The ball plinked in-

to the catcher's mitt, the umpire yelled "*Strike Three!*" and the crowd began to mutter sympathetically.

Dave walked slowly away from the plate, his eyes clouded. He knew now what was happening. He had achieved his goal, and could go no further. His mental power had left him after the sixty-first home run, and no amount of concentration could bring it back. Number Sixty-One had given him complete fulfillment, Sixty-Two was unnecessary, and he'd never hit it.

Dave sat on the bench, looking bitterly out—and then he smiled. They *wouldn't* laugh. They wouldn't understand why he had fizzled out after his one astounding season, but they'd never laugh.

The sixty-one home runs would be there, in the cold print of the record books, for all time. Dave smiled happily. He was washed up as a player, but he'd achieved the single goal of his life. He'd turned his dream into reality. He was *someone*, now, and what happened from now on didn't matter.

He headed toward the locker-room. He knew Dave Marks would never enter a ballpark again.

But baseball would never forget him.

THE END



According to you...

Dear Editor:

Some people criticize the illustrations in your magazines, but I wonder if any of them have ever drawn anything themselves. They ought to try, it's not all as easy as it looks. I like Finlay and I imagine he has plenty of illustrations to do so he can't spend too much time on all. Anyway, some Finlay is better than none.

Geneva Koovich

Box 27

Dillonvale, Ohio

• *Are you by any chance a cover artist in disguise? Or married to one?*

Dear Editor:

I am a busy housewife and mother and I don't get too much time for reading. Not nearly as much as I'd like, especially since *Fantastic* seems to be improving so much.

Sorry I missed that October poll, but I see by your February editorial that the results were exactly as I would have voted. I do say though, that an occasional classic reprint would be most welcome. Some by Lovecraft and A. Merritt especially.

In regard to your editorial in the December issue concerning the cartoon in the *New Yorker*: my husband and I had a discussion about the same thing after we saw it. It is sad, but true, that most people do seem to lack the "sense of wonder." We are optimistic however, and hope that enough still remain here and there who do have it.

Enjoyed "The Screaming People" and "Passage to Gomorrah" in the January issue. Of the shorts "Nothing But Terror" was the best. So far, I'm disappointed in "The Troons of

Space." However, I've only just started it, so I will reserve judgment until I complete it.

Mrs. Frank Fielder
36 James Road
Hatboro, Pa.

• *Working around a magazine office for awhile is a guaranteed way to develop a sense of wonder—wonder that the darn thing manages to get out every month!*

Dear Editor:

"The Body Hunters" by Fairman was so much better, in my opinion, than the lead in the previous issue, "The Screaming People." Can't we have just a few more by him this year?

In the March issue I was so really enthusiastic over Robert F. Young's "The Last Hero." It was the best story in that group. Once more a favorite author of mine has run away with the top honors.

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

• *Oom Paul will have a short novel in next month's Fantastic, and is already working on another one for us.*

Dear Editor:

I must write and tell you how much I admire your new covers. I like this different color.

In the February issue Henry Slesar was good as usual but the best story was "The Body Hunters" by Paul Fairman.

I like the idea of weird-horror stories but the plot in Rog Phillip's story for the February issue was worn out long ago.

I do think your magazine has improved though and would not dream of missing it.

Keep up the editorial and the letters from the readers. I always read them first and enjoy them.

Phillip Farr
2930 Main St.
Kansas City, Mo.

Dear Editor:

The February issue of *Fantastic* is your best yet. The cover

immediately struck me as excellent. Very vivid coloring and an especially good background.

Your editorial policy seems to be set now and I like it. The weird type tales have always been a favorite of mine. However, may I stress one point? No editorial policy, however well formulated and designed, is so good that an occasional change will do it any harm. Thus, please print an occasional varying story of straight s-f or light humor-fantasy.

"The Troons of Space" stories lived up to all the blurbs and prophecies. I didn't think there was a bad story in the lot, and one I'd rank outstanding was the episode on Mars. Real good s-f there.

Glad to see your classified section is coming along so well. I admit I don't know the effects of the advertising in the old pulp mags, but there sure was a lot of it.

Hope you can continue to turn out issues like the last.

Vic Ryan
2160 Sylvan Road
Springfield, Illinois

• *Thanks for all the kind words, Phil and Vic. We have some top-notch covers on tap, several crackerjack pieces of humor-fantasy, and many other pleasant prospects.*

Dear Editor:

It seems that these days s-f is leaning toward the occult rather than straight s-f. What happened to stories like "The Sixth Columns?" Terror tales also seem to be rising. Let's have some of the old type s-f in the future.

"The Creeper in the Dream" was tops in February *Fantastic*. "The Garden of Fast" was second.

The classified ads are a good idea. Like your art work too.

Steve Clideburg
103 West 22nd
Hutchinson, Kansas

• *Well, Steve, occult is what the customers said they want. You can't please everybody all the time.*

Dear Editor:

I have been reading science fiction for about four years now.

I have seen a lot of good s-f magazines in my time, but *Fantastic* is the best, and it has been getting steadily better.

Your authors are the finest of any magazine. Randall Garrett's "The Savage Machine" and "The Trouble With Magic" were two of the greatest stories I've ever read in your magazine. E. K. Jarvis and Henry Slesar are also very good.

I have a subscription to *Fantastic* and I'm taking out another one as soon as this one expires.

Stephen Birnbaum
657 Cornelia
Chicago 13, Ill.

• *Take two! It's only a digest-sized magazine. Give one to your favorite succubus!*

Dear Editor:

Your February issue looked quite good, so I decided to purchase it after missing the January issue. I would give top rating to Rog Phillips' story "The Creeper in the Dream." "Garden of Fast" was good.

I have had one main objection: the name fantastic does not fit a share of your stories. Mr. Webster defines the word as: odd; whimsical; grotesque; unreal; imaginary. Then what, if I may be so bold as to ask, are stories like "The Troons of Space" doing here? Isn't science fiction supposed to be fairly plausible?

I enjoyed *Weird Tales* and still consider it the finest of its type that ever existed. Now it's gone, but the people who wrote for it are still around. Let's have stories by them.

I was happy to read of the poll you took and still happier to learn that weird-horror stories took first place. I cast my vote for them too.

R. D. Miller
5753 31st N. E.
Seattle 5, Wash.

• *That's a good question, Mr. Miller. Any of you s-f last-ditchers care to answer?*



THE ONLY ONE THAT LIVED

By ROG PHILLIPS

*Here's a magically written
tour de force, a touching
and tragic story of an alien
trapped in the swamp of
humanity's conflicting
emotions.*

JANUARY 1, 2357. Hello Mr. Diary. My name is Mr. Both. I had another name at one time. It was Ten. No Mr . . . I was named Ten because I was the tenth, and the only one that lived. The first nine died from the operation. I was given the name Both by my master's wife Gerta and the title of Mr. was conferred on me by my master during a quarrel they had. I don't remember what that particular quarrel was about. In the midst of it Gerta shouted in her high pitched angry voice, "I hate you and your monster Both!" My master smiled and said, "Well, well. My monster Both." Then he turned to me and said, "Hello Mr. Both." I was very pleased with the name and from that time on I refused to answer to any

other name. Everyone considers me not very intelligent because I refuse to answer to any other name or even to just Both without the title. I like being considered not very intelligent.

I am intelligent because of the operation. I am the only member of my race who is intelligent.

I am not human.

January 5, 2357. My master's wife Gerta does not like me. She fears me, she is sometimes fascinated toward me in what I suspect is the same way she would be fascinated toward the brink of a precipice. At least that is what my master said to her today during dinner. It upset her so much she couldn't continue eating, so it is probably true.

I know that sometimes she is sexually attracted to me with the same smoldering intensity she exhibits toward men who are not my master. She smells differently when she is that way. When she is that way toward a man who is not my master she slips a note to the man or whispers in his ear. Then for a period of a week or two she goes shopping every day and goes visiting every night. After that flurry of activity has ended she settles down to staying home and quarreling with my master, choosing almost anything that he does to be angry about.

My master never quarrels. He is always happy but in different ways. Even when his wife Gerta is very angry and shouting very loud he is happy, but then there is a difference, his happiness has a knife edge. I suspect that he hates her. He has never shown in any way that he hates her. He is happiest when she is in one of her shopping and visiting periods.

My master's name is Boris.

January 9, 2357. I go to school every day. Boris is my teacher. Sometimes during the school session there are other men present too. They take no part. They sit and watch my master and me and

look at one another and make facial expressions of surprise and amusement. Sometimes they look at me strangely as though they are trying to decide how intelligent I am. They fear me. They smell differently when they fear me. Once, a long time ago, I broke the arm of a man. It was an experiment, and I learned from it that the sour smell that came to men when I got near them was caused by fear. I had not known that before. I had thought perhaps that in their way the men were sexually attracted toward me.

My master punished me for breaking the man's arm. Because he punished me I did not tell him it had been an experiment. I told my master's wife Gerta when he wasn't there. She has never feared me.

I think my master feared me when I broke that man's arm, but I can't be sure.

He has never feared me any other time.

January 13, 2357. Boris left yesterday on a trip to First Colony. I have never been there so I don't know where it is. He is to be gone four days.

He did not want to make the trip.

There is another man in the house. His name is Stuart. He arrived a few hours before my master left. He came from First Colony.

The trip has to do with something called renewal of contract and salary cut. No one explained to me what those expressions mean. I don't know of my own knowledge what the trip is about.

Gerta is sexually attracted to Stuart. It happened suddenly when he had been here about half an hour. She and Boris were taking Stuart around the house. I was opening and closing the doors for them as I have always done when we have company. Gerta turned her ankle on the stairway down to the controls room and started to fall. Stuart was just behind her and caught her by putting his arms around her. I was below her on the stairway and turned when she started to fall. I saw the whole thing. Her arms had gone up and Stuart's arms went under hers and around so that his hands pressed against her breasts, which are quite large compared to those of most of the women who have been here.

He tried to shift his hands so they would be under her breasts. She was too off balance. He might have succeed-

ed in changing the position of his hands anyway but suddenly she clamped her hands over his and held them where they were, and her smell changed. He lifted her then until she could stand. He pulled his hands out from under hers and gripped her shoulders. By then my master had come beside them. He did not know what had happened.

Stuart was very upset about it for some reason. Before he had smiled quite often at Gerta. After, he avoided looking at her as much as he could. Once when Boris was talking about one of the valve combinations and looking the other way Gerta caught Stuart's eye and let her eyes get very round and with a soft expression around her lips. Stuart looked into her eyes as though he were fascinated in the same way he would be toward the brink of a cliff.

When my master Boris left to go on the trip to First Colony Gerta and Stuart watched him climb into his ship and rise up from the garage. While the roof of the garage was closing Gerta moved over so that her hip touched Stuart's. He moved away as though something red hot had touched him. He mumbled,

"Got to get to work." Then he turned and went away. I knew he went to the office room. Gerta looked in several rooms before going to the office. She tried the door to the office room very quietly and it was locked. She went to her own room and stayed there until dinner time.

At dinner time she came down. She was wearing a very low cut close fitting dress that left about half of each breast uncovered, and the outline of her body very obvious. She told me to go fetch Stuart. I had a key to the office just as I have keys to all the rooms. I have had them ever since I was taught how to use them.

I opened the door to the office and told Stuart he was to come to the dining room and eat. He looked as though he were going to refuse. I moved a step closer to him. I could feel the smell of fear on him, suddenly. He took a deep breath and said, "All right."

I did not enjoy dinner very much even though, on the surface, I was the center of attention. I have mastered the art of graceful eating with knife, fork and spoon as well as any human I have seen, though once in a great while I still break something, but not very often. I didn't

break anything. I felt like it though, several times. Gerta asked me to recite some things, and all the time while I was reciting she kept leaning toward Stuart and saying things in a low voice. It was only so that her breasts would be exposed more. Stuart seemed not to like this and I think he didn't like it. He kept his eyes on me most of the time, but every minute or so he would dart a quick look at Gerta and breathe faster.

When dinner was over and the dishes slid into the waste chute Stuart started to leave the room. Gerta stood up and took a step after him, then said very sharply, "Stuart!" He stopped and turned toward her. She went across the room to him and stood less than a foot away from him. Then she took his hands and started to lift them. She intended to put them on her breasts the way they had been on the stairway. He jerked them away and said "No" several times. Then she put her arms around his neck too quickly for him to stop her. She planted her lips on his and refused to let go. He tried to pull her arms from around his neck.

I went over closer and watched. It was very interest-

ing. Her fingernails dug into the back of his neck and brought blood. They struggled, or rather, he struggled, and after a little of this he got away from her and ran from the room. He had pushed her violently in getting away from her and she fell to the floor.

She sat there crying. I felt very sorry for her. I remembered how Stuart had picked her up when she stumbled on the stairway. I moved around behind her and stooped down. I quickly slid my arms under hers and put my hands on her breasts and lifted her to her feet.

I kept my hands on her breasts. I expected her to put hers over mine as she had Stuart's. She remained very quiet. I began to realize she wasn't going to put her hands over mine on her breasts. It didn't matter.

It was the first time I had touched any part of her except her hand. I was surprised at how warm and soft her breasts were. I was beginning to wonder why she was so quiet when she suddenly said, very softly, "Mr. Both, let go of me."

I let go of her. She stepped away from me and turned around and looked into my face. She seemed to be study-

ing me. She was very white as though all the blood had left her skin.

Suddenly she ran a few steps toward the door, then stopped and bent over.

She lost her dinner. I think Stuart's coldness upset her.

January 17, 2357. My master Boris is back from First Colony and Stuart is gone. Stuart must have been quite hungry because he didn't come out of the office until my master returned from his trip. I tried to get in to him once. He had the door fixed in some way so that I couldn't get the key to work. It was all right after he left though. I used my key to make sure, and it worked.

Gerta pretended to be happy that my master was back. She clung to his arm all the time until Stuart left. Boris wanted Stuart to stay.

Stuart said good-bye to me last of all, and he shook hands with me. I do not like for anyone to shake hands with me. I do it because it is expected of me. But then, Stuart shook hands with me because it was expected of him. He smelled very strongly of fear while he did it. That is understandable. What I can't understand is why he feared Gerta. He was a very strange man, not

at all like the others I have met.

My master arrived home tired but seemed to revive his spirits until he was even happier than he usually is. He kept studying Stuart's face and Gerta's face. I kept studying my master's face. For the first few minutes after his arrival the tiredness on his face was very evident. Suddenly his eyes widened and his smile appeared. It remained, shifting, so that at one time the corners of his smile turned upward, and at another time curved downward the way they do when Gerta is angry. After Stuart had left, my master turned to Gerta, his smile growing. Then he started laughing and couldn't seem to stop. He rocked back and forth, slapping his hands against his legs and laughing. He kept saying, "Oh, this is priceless." He said it several times. Gerta did not laugh. She did not get angry, either. Instead, she took my hand and said, "Come, Mr. Both, we will leave this clown to himself for a while."

I went along beside her for a few steps. Suddenly my master stopped laughing. He said, "Mr. Both, you will stay here with me."

I stopped. Gerta tugged at

my hand and said, "No, Mr. Both. You will go with me."

I do not know how I could have obeyed one without disobeying the other one.

I obeyed Gerta.

January 21, 2357. Once I ran away. That was a long time ago. I returned to the place where I had lived in my wild state before I was captured. I do not remember why I ran away but I remember quite well why I came back.

I am human.

I do not like the things that make me doubt that I am human. That is why I do not like mirrors and never look in them. I do not like to shake hands, either, because then I am conscious of how different my hands are.

When I am only looking out of my eyes I am completely human. That is when I am happiest. I smile, and visualize the corners of my smile turning upward or curling downward with the changing mood of my happiness, my nose sharply bridged and with narrow nostrils, my forehead rising from twinkling blue eyes in a white expanse to a scalpline where long brown hair begins and is combed back. I stand, and visualize my legs long and straight, my feet small and

narrow, and my arms as short slender instruments of my mind.

Then, to myself, I am entirely human. My thoughts run smoothly and are entirely in words. I talk without difficulty, and on any subject I am familiar with, and I am familiar with many. I match wits with people in conversation and hold my own, to their amazement.

A year ago one of the men who was present during one of the classroom sessions said something which appealed to me. He said, "Mr. Both, you are far more fortunate than ordinary humans. Your God is always present so that, little by little, day by day, you can create yourself in His image. Ordinary humans must create their God in their own image, and after they have done so they must pretend they did not create Him and that He created them in His image." I remembered that. Many times I have questioned guests about their God, and always I have seen that this man was right.

Only once did I tell someone what his God really was. He became angry and said, "I know my God exists and I can be like Him. You have no God at all. Your God is a man, and not a very good one at that.

Even so, can you ever be like him? Look at yourself in a mirror. Look at your hands, your skin. *Look at them.*"

I was upset for a long time after that. My master Boris understood why I was upset. He told me, "Mr. Both, no one ever becomes completely like their God in every way. You become like Him in your own mind by not looking at your imperfections, by trying in the ways you can succeed to be like Him."

At another time my master said to me, "A man's God is too personal a thing to talk to him about without making him angry. If he is a good man he tries to be like his God in the privacy of his soul, and for you to pry into that is the same as trying to tear off his clothes and leave him naked for others to see."

When my master told me that, I understood at last about men's Gods and about men's clothes. I do not like to take my clothes off even in the presence of my master and reveal the scars from the operation. Of course the scars on my face and head cannot be concealed, but they are different. They are the symbol of my elevation to the status of a human, the scars from putting something in. Those

others are the scars of removal and are ugly.

Sometimes when I am asleep I have dreams in which I am the way I used to be when I was an animal. At such times, in those dreams, I completely forget that I am human. When I awaken, for a moment I lay there, still in the dream, until I move to stretch or flex a part I no longer have. Then suddenly I am fully awake, but for the fraction of a second I try to return to the dream, to be the animal I once was.

Then I am filled with shame for my desire to be an animal. I throw off the covers and take a hot shower and put on fresh clothing and talk aloud to myself to hear words and be happy that I am human. By activity I drive out the old memories. Then I can look out from my eyes and be completely human, or more accurately, more like Boris. My master Boris is my God.

I do not know what his wife Gerta is.

January 25, 2357. Something terrible has happened and I can't understand why it has happened. I will start at the beginning, if there actually is a beginning. It started the day after my master Boris returned from First

Colony and it may have to do with what I can't understand. I suspect it had to do with my going with Gerta when I had two opposing commands. The quarrel began with that, at any rate.

I did not see my master until the next day. He was not at dinner that night. Gerta and I ate alone. She said Boris was sulking. My own opinion is he was tired from his trip, and not hungry.

I spent the night reading and studying as I usually do during the sleep period of my master. (My own sleep period is once every four days and lasts almost a whole day, and corresponds to the period of natural darkness just as the sleep period of my master and his wife Gerta corresponds to the period that would be naturally dark on their home planet.) In the morning my master's bearing toward me was very different than it had ever been. I felt that I had done something to displease him, but when I asked him if that were so he denied it.

At dinner that evening I learned the truth. He was angry at Gerta for having issued a command to me in contradiction to his own command. She said it was the other way around, she had issued a command first and

merely repeated it after he had issued a command violating hers. He said to her that she had issued the command for me to go with her to make him jealous. I do not understand this at all. He also said it was bad enough that she was a nymph, he could live with that from necessity, but anything worse would not go. A nymph is a female god according to the dictionary, who lives in a forest or a spring. I would think this should compliment Gerta if it were not that his tone of voice implied contempt. I have no idea what he meant and I feel a reluctance to ask him.

I'm sure Gerta knew what he meant though. She became very red in the face, then suddenly very white all over. Speaking very calmly and slowly, and looking at Boris, she said, "Getting at you might be a very good motive for something like that. I will keep it in mind, darling."

Boris said, "Or excuse?" But his good humor was restored. He was smiling, the corners of his smile turned down, his eyes very bright.

His becoming happy again seemed to have an upsetting effect on Gerta. She got up from the table and ran from the room. Boris and I finished the meal in silence.

I felt uneasy and didn't know why I should feel that way except that for the first time in my memory he would not take me with him on his rounds of the house. I tried to follow him but finally gave up.

I was unhappy and I grew lonely. I decided to go to Gerta. I went to her room and knocked on the door as I have been taught to do. She came to the door and let me in.

She did not let me stay long, and all the time I was there she talked rapidly and nervously, going from one subject to another with no connection of thought that I could see. She kept looking at me strangely, too. Often she would get very red, then as quickly very white, and stop talking for a moment. At the end of the half hour she told me to go. I went to the door. Then she said not to go. I turned around to come back, and she said for me to go, so I did. Since I cannot understand that, maybe it too has something to do with what has happened.

All this was making confusion in my thoughts when last I wrote in you, Mr. Diary, and I decided to write nothing to you about it, hoping the confusion would go away in time.

I knew only one thing. I was unhappy and I would do anything I could to make my master pleased with me again. I did not know what I would do. I just watched and thought about it.

On January 22nd when I awakened from my sleep and went down into the house Gerta seemed to be her old self again, at least. She told me visitors were coming. She was very happy in anticipation. I felt a great sense of relief. She would enjoy the company and afterward she would go shopping every day and to parties at other houses in the evenings. My master Boris and I would be alone and we would return to the old way, with classes and study and discussion of all things.

The company came yesterday early in the afternoon. There were many people. Everyone was happy. Even I was happy. My master Boris seemed proud of me as he always does when there is company.

As always I watched people, anticipating their wishes often enough to amaze them. As always I tried to pick out the man Gerta would enjoy. I thought I had picked him out. He was a dark-haired

man called Jimmy whose eyes followed her whenever she was in the room. Her eyes would meet his and I could smell that she liked him.

She did not behave as usual though. When Jimmy tried to get her alone she refused. I knew that my master wanted them to be together. Whenever Jimmy was with her, Boris would smile at Gerta. For some reason this disturbed her.

It occurred to me that perhaps the recent events that had confused me might have confused Gerta as well. Out of this thought came the suggestion of how I could please her and be once again in my master's good graces.

I thought carefully about it. I did not want to be wrong. I was sure I was not wrong. I waited until I could be alone with Jimmy for a moment. Then I told him what I knew to be true, that if he stood behind her and put his arms under hers and his hands on her breasts she would be very pleased. Jimmy's eyes grew very round for an instant, so I knew he had not thought of that manner of pleasing her until I told him. He thanked me and went back with the others.

I was very happy then. I expected everything to be the

way it had always been. I followed Gerta around, waiting for Jimmy to come to her. That is why I missed whatever it was that took place. I heard my master call to me, saying, "Mr. Both, will you show Mr. and Mrs. Prentiss to the door?" I went to my master to obey. Mr. and Mrs. Prentiss had been here many times and had always been very friendly people. I wondered why they were leaving when the party had just begun.

When I reached them to escort them to the door Mr. Prentiss was saying to my master Boris, "I am sure there is no necessity of taking Mr. Both away from your wife to show us the way out."

My master Boris stopped smiling and said, "Never mind, Mr. Both, I will show them out myself."

I was very disappointed because I am very proud of my duty of conducting people through the house and opening doors for them. I concealed my hurt, but everyone around the room was looking at me strangely as though they sensed my hurt.

My master Boris came back after a few minutes and he was completely changed, as though he were insane. He did not enter the room at first, but

stood in the doorway, his face very white. He looked around the room, and everyone in the room was looking at him except Gerta and Mr. and Mrs. Jones who had been in one corner of the room for quite a while, talking, and unaware of the change that seemed to have settled over everyone else.

Suddenly my master Boris spoke. He said, "Mr. Green." (That is Jimmy's other name.) "Come out into the hall with me."

Jimmy went to the doorway where my master Boris stood, and went past him into the hall. Boris followed him, closing the door. I turned to look across the room toward Gerta. One of the people was saying something which I couldn't hear to Mr. and Mrs. Jones. They left Gerta and went a few feet away, and talked together for a minute, then turned and looked at Gerta. They did not go back to her. Mrs. Jones said something to Gerta which I couldn't hear. Whatever it was, it had a very bad effect on Gerta. She ran to the center of the room and shouted, "Is that what you all think? It isn't true. Do you understand? It isn't true."

There was a loud bang from the direction of the

door. I turned my head to see what had happened. My master Boris stood in the doorway again and I realized he had opened the door so violently it had slammed against the wall. He said, "All right. All of you. Get out of my house. I have something to do."

They were all moving toward the door. I knew what my duty was when a party was over. I did not know why it was suddenly over, but I would have to stand at the door and shake hands with everyone. I had only taken a few steps when my master Boris said, "Mr. Both, go to your room."

I did not know why he told me to go to my room, however, I obeyed. I had been in my room only a few seconds when I heard my master's footsteps on the stairway. I thought, "Now he will tell me everything and I will understand what has happened." Instead, the door did not open. I heard a sliding sound. I knew what it was, though it had not happened for a very long time. My master Boris had slid the bolt on the outside of the door.

Since then I have had to remain in my room because he has not moved the bolt back so the door can be opened. My food is pushed in through a

small opening in the door next to the floor. It is my master Boris who brings my food. I know his footsteps on the stairway. I plead with him to let me out. I ask him what I have done wrong.

He never answers.

January 29, 2357. I am insane. My master Boris has said so, and the other men who looked into my room through the small opening at the bottom of the door agreed with him. I did not know what the word meant until I looked it up in my dictionary. Even then I did not understand until I had thought about it a great deal. Then I understood. I know they are right. Humans are sane, of course. If not all of them, then surely my master Boris. He is my God and whatever he does is right. When I cannot understand what he does, then I must be irrational.

I will prove it.

In my last sleep period I dreamed very vividly that I was as I had been before the operation. I was in my home grounds where I was captured. My huge tail, three times as long as my body and weighing twice as much, threshed in the shallow water. The net in which I was trapped was stout but my strong

tail was able to break it in many places. My arms and legs, however, were caught through the net in such a manner that I could not get free. Then humans came, and a fine stream of liquid that wasn't water bathed my face, stinging my eyes. I fell asleep in my dreams, just as I did so long ago in waking consciousness.

When I awakened it was to my room, not to the dream. At first I did not know that. I slid out of bed to the floor with the old movements and started to move forward, but the movement caused me to flip over backwards because I had forgotten that I no longer have my enormous tail, just as I no longer have my middle legs.

Flipping over onto my back should not have hurt me, yet I almost lost consciousness from the pain that shot through me. I had been hurt, but not from flipping over onto my back. There were deep bruised streaks all over me as though I had been beaten with something long and thin and harder than my skin. My bones felt shattered.

Then I saw Gerta. She was lying on the floor in the same place where she is now. She had on no clothes. One of her arms was bent at a sharp

angle where there was no joint for it to bend. Her hair was matted and wet and smelled of blood. Her eyes were open. She did not move, nor even breathe.

She is there even now as I write in you, Mr. Diary, yet I know it cannot be so because she is human and it is impossible for any human to be that way. Those who are not human can be that way. I have seen them. Humans never change. When I was operated on I was much smaller in my body than I am now. My body without the tail weighs more now than it did with the tail then. Yet during all the time I have lived since the operation Gerta has not changed at all until I saw her lying there.

It is inconceivable that humans could ever change in any way.

Then I heard my master Boris on the stairway, and also other footsteps. I heard my master, just outside the door. He said, "She is in there with it. I tried to save her but it attacked me and when I beat it off it grabbed her and ran up here."

Then a voice I did not recognize said, "Is it still in there?"

My master said, "I'll look."

I saw the cover of the small opening at the bottom of the door open and my master Boris's eye appear. He looked around the room, and at me. I tried to speak to him but terrible pains in my face made me dizzy and weak. I reached up to see what was wrong with my face, and by gently touching my face in different spots I realized that the bone structure was completely shattered into many small bits, and without it I could not form words.

Though the pain made it difficult to see, I saw that my Master Boris was gone from the opening. I heard him say that it was still in here.

Another face appeared in the opening, then pulled away and the cover was closed. I heard another strange voice say, "It sure is. And it's killed your wife. We'll have to get a heavy gun and kill it."

For the first time in my memory I felt fear such as I have seen in humans.

It was then that my master Boris said, "Mr. Both must be insane." Two other voices said, "Mr. Both? Oh. Yes, of course."

Then I heard them go back down the stairway. I tried to call to them to take me with them but the sounds in my

throat could not be altered by my shapeless face into words.

When I could hear their footsteps no longer my fear became almost more than I could bear. Gradually it grew less. But in a sense my fear gave me comfort, and in a strange way. I think now I understand about the Gods of humans. Let me see if I can explain to you. Much I do not understand, but a little I do.

Gerta was killed. Whoever killed her must have been very powerful since it would be almost impossible for any human to be killed. I can understand that.

I was beaten until very little is left to me, yet I did not wake up from my sleep while it was going on. That too is impossible. Such sleep has come to me only twice in my memory. The time I was captured in the net, and the time I went to sleep an animal and awakened after the operation. It must have been the same kind of sleep.

So whatever did these things must be much like a human, though more powerful. My master Boris looked in this room and saw it and said it was still here. Another man looked in and said he saw it. It must, therefore, be in here. I cannot see it at all, nor even smell it or hear it.

At first I could not understand how that could possibly be. I wondered if they could mean me when they said "it." But that isn't possible because my master Boris saw whatever it is and knows it was not I. So there must be something in here that I can't see or hear or smell, and so powerful that I am helpless beside it. The only thing I can think of that could be like that, invisible and more powerful than I, is the God of some human.

So far, since my master Boris left, it has not touched

me nor made its presence known. It has not disturbed me while I wrote this entry in you, Mr. Diary.

Now I must stop writing for a little while. I hear them on the stairway, my master Boris and some other humans. I will remain sitting here at my desk, it is so painful to move. I hear them at the door. In a moment they will be taking the cover off the opening at the bottom of the door. Then they will kill it.

Then I can be with my master Boris.

THE END



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